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THE SUBMARINE JOB

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FILES

CLIFFORD RILEY

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The logo is a vertical stack of text elements. At the top is 'CAHILL' in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below it is 'THE' in a smaller, similar font. The central element is a large, metallic-looking number '39' that appears to be floating over a dark, textured globe. Below the globe is the word 'CLUES' in a bold, sans-serif font, and at the bottom is 'FILES' in a larger, bold, sans-serif font. The entire logo has a metallic, three-dimensional appearance with highlights and shadows.

CLIFFORD RILEY

SCHOLASTIC INC.

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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

To whom it may concern,

The information in this book comes from the Cahill vault, which means that *none* of it was meant for your eyes. Over the past 500 years, a number of exceedingly dangerous items have been placed in the vault for safekeeping—assassination orders, confession-filled diaries, treasure maps, and many other items that I know better than to list here. Documents that have sparked wars, incited revolutions, and led to the downfall of governments, kings, and empires.

It was *not* my idea to make this material public. I was given specific instructions by my former employer, William McIntyre, to protect the information in the vault. However, after recent, tragic events, it looks like I'm taking orders from someone new—someone who believes that the Cahill Files are essential to the security of the Cahill family . . . and the world at large.

And so, the vault has been opened. Do with these stories what you will. But when you find yourself weighed down by the secrets and scandals that shaped history, just remember one thing: I told you so.

Clifford Riley

THE SUBMARINE JOB

Connecticut, 1955

Fiske Cahill was going to drown.

Water filled his nose and mouth and eyes, and all he could do was flail his arms and pray it would stop soon. The world around him was a dull roar, muffled by the sound of the water as it flooded his ears. The hand on the back of his head held him still; there was no escape.

Suddenly, it jerked him backward. He gasped in the air, even though it smelled like bleach and too-sweet air freshener. He could taste the chemicals in the air and he spat, trying to keep the water from trickling down past his lips.

“Come on, now,” said the boy behind him. “I thought you were a fish. Aren’t you a fish, Fish Face?”

“No,” Fiske grunted before his face was shoved back into the toilet. He only barely snapped his mouth closed in time. Faintly, he could hear the last bell of the day ringing from the hallways. Like dogs at the sound of a whistle, the boys let go of Fiske. He threw himself backward, away from the toilet. The group around him, four or five boys from the years ahead of him, backed away, laughing. They all sucked their cheeks in and put their hands to their necks, waving their fingers like gills as they ran out of the bathroom. Their leader, Eric Landry, turned on the faucet before he left, flinging water at Fiske with his fingertips.

It was not a good way to end the day.

Fiske pulled himself up off of the wet, slippery bathroom floor and went to the sink. His hair was soaked and so was his sweater, from his shoulders down to his stomach. Drops of toilet water trickled down over his ears and nose. Fiske grabbed desperately for a fistful of brown paper towels and scrubbed at his face and hair.

It was utterly mortifying, even with no one else in the bathroom.

This sort of thing should not happen to Fiske Cahill. It shouldn’t happen to a Cahill at all.

He picked his books up from the corner where Eric and his gang of friends had thrown them. His history book was splayed open with its papery guts shown to the world. George Washington stared back up at him, sword raised, horse rearing. He was willing to bet that George Washington never got swirled. Or that Shakespeare never had a note reading “Kicketh me” taped to his back, or that Mozart never had his sheet music pitched into the toilet. Fiske was supposed to have something in common with such amazing people. They were his cousins, after all, all of them far-flung members of the Cahill family. The Cahills — the most powerful family in the history of the world. Cahills were supposed to be something special, untouchable. They were supposed to be great.

Some good that was doing for Fiske. The only thing he was great at was distracting Eric and his friends from their homework.

Fiske tucked his books into his backpack and stepped into the main hall at school. He’d be able to go home for the summer soon, he told himself. It was early May, so there was only a month left of school. He could last a month.

Outside, the spring sun was hot and groups of his schoolmates lounged around on benches or threw a football across the green. It was a beautiful campus, made of lush lawns against stately brick buildings with white columns in front of them. But Fiske kept his head down as he crossed toward the dorms, and so he didn’t see very much of it.

“Fiske Cahill! Mr. Cahill!”

One of the secretaries was hailing him, waving a piece of paper in the air. “Fiske Cahill, don’t make an old lady run across the lawn. Come here, and be quick about it!”

Fiske looked up and around him. Were they all staring at him now? Oh, no. Fiske hurried across the lawn, feeling his ears and neck burn bright red with embarrassment.

“Why are you all wet?” asked the secretary, wrinkling her nose at him.

“Uh,” said Fiske, and then he mumbled something about a water fountain.

“A telegram for you,” said the secretary, handing it over. Her fingernails were painted scarlet to match her bright red sweater. “An emergency, it says. Silly, if you ask me. It doesn’t make any sense! Well, not that I meant to read your private business or anything, but I had to make sure it wasn’t anything bad or illegal.” She looked at him from over her half-moon eyeglasses in a way that made him feel as if he were beneath a swinging lamp in an interrogation room.

“Y-yes, ma’am,” he said, unfolding the telegram.

“And here I am, running across the whole school to deliver your nonsensical telegram. Let me tell you, if I wanted to deliver messages I would have been born a carrier pigeon. Well? Are you going to say thank you, young man?”

“Uh, thank you,” said Fiske, glancing up from the telegram for only a moment. The secretary frowned at him, then turned quite sharply and marched back to the office, likely muttering something about kids these days.

FAMILY TROUBLE STOP. NEW YEAR’S 1946 STOP. OLD FAMILY FRIENDS EVERYWHERE
STOP. GRACE.

Fiske could only stare at the telegram, his stomach going cold and his mouth dry. It looked like a simple note to anyone else, but Fiske could see through the lines. Family trouble. Grace was in trouble.

Old family friends everywhere.

Vespers. Sworn enemies of the Cahills.

New Year’s 1946? Fiske’s mind was clicking so rapidly that it was having trouble making complete thoughts. For Christmas 1945, he’d gotten a new set of water-colors and a brand-new easel. He could remember that. Grace had given them to him. And then he hadn’t been allowed to stay and paint things because — because why?

Because they’d had to go to Washington, DC. There had been Cahill business to attend to, and no one would let Fiske stay home when the nanny was visiting her sister. So Grace was in Washington.

Surrounded by Vespers.

Fiske folded the telegram again and shoved it in his pocket. He was shaking so hard that he thought his skin would come loose and fall off; his breath was so strained in his throat that he might choke on the air. Grace wouldn’t have risked sending a message to school if she wasn’t in danger. He glanced around again; was anyone still looking at him? Had they even been looking in the first place? Cahill business made him uncomfortable — vulnerable, as if he was being watched.

With one more stealthy look around, Fiske turned straight for the headmaster’s office. He’d have to get permission to leave as soon as possible.

And then he ran into something. Or someone. Eric Landry.

“What have you got there, Fish Face?” Eric asked, holding out his hand.

Fiske only looked at him. *Not now*, he screamed inside his head. *Get out of the way.*

“Now what have you got there that’s got you so long in the face?” asked Eric, making a grab for Fiske’s pocket. “Girlfriend break up with you? Your dog die? Gramma fallen sick, Fish Face? Someone snatch her up and ship her back to the sea? Your gramma is a fish, too, isn’t she? A big old whale, maybe?”

“Don’t rip it!” Fiske yelped, the words squeaking out of him as if he had been squeezed too hard. He jerked away, holding the telegram tightly.

“Oh, don’t rip it!” Eric sang, mocking Fiske. He made another grab for it. Fiske jumped out of the way. “Stop moving around, Cahill, and give me that telegram.”

“Hey, Eric,” said one of the other boys. “Let him go. He looks upset.”

“He’s gonna look more upset if he doesn’t cough up that telegram.”

“Why do you care?” said the other boy. His name was Matthew, and he was in Fiske’s history class. “It’s nothing important. It’s just Cahill. Like anything exciting or interesting would ever happen to him.”

Fiske held his breath. He needed to go; he needed to get out of this.

Eric smirked at Matthew and then shoved Fiske away. “Get out of my way, Cahill.”

Fiske turned on his heel and ran off toward the headmaster’s office. Eric and Matthew and the other boys laughed as he sprinted away.

George Washington would never, ever run away from anything. Something burned in Fiske at the thought. Something that said no matter how he tried, he’d never live up to the standards that he was supposed to meet.



In the headmaster’s office, the secretary in bright red lifted an eyebrow at him. “You know the rules. You can’t just *leave* school.”

“B-but I have to go,” said Fiske, showing her the telegram. “It’s from my sister. If there’s a family emergency, I need to be there for it.” He wet his lips and shifted from foot to foot. They *had* to let him go.

“That’s very touching,” said the secretary, pushing the telegram back toward him. “But I’m afraid the headmaster isn’t available at the moment. And look, it says right there that you have old family friends all over the place. That’s nice, isn’t it? Your sister isn’t alone.”

“It’s, uh, it’s not the same as family,” said Fiske. “Please, can’t I see him? He’ll understand, I know he will.”

“No. I’m afraid he’s not here at the moment. So sorry about that. But you can schedule an appointment with him for next Wednesday.”

“But that’s over a week from now!” said Fiske, his voice cracking. “If it’s an emergency, then I need to leave right away.”

“I’m so *very* sorry for the inconvenience, but I’m afraid that’s the best I can offer you,” said the secretary. She smiled at him then, and it wasn’t a very nice smile at all. It was the kind of smile a cat would give a canary right before gobbling it down.

Fiske wanted to throw things. He wanted to jump up onto her desk and pitch a fit and force her to see that this wasn’t a game. It wasn’t something silly. It was a Cahill thing, and more than that, it was *Grace*.

Instead, he bit his tongue and ran out of the office. He would go to his dorm. He would figure something out. Somehow.



The secretary waited until he was gone, and then picked up the phone. With her red fingernails, she spun the rotary dial, waiting impatiently as it ticked back and forth.

“Yes, hello,” she said. “This is Eighty-nine. The Boy King will be trying to flee soon. I’ve tried to delay him, but he’ll take alternative measures. I’m recommending a tail, and eyes at Meriden and the train station. Very good. Thank you.” She put the receiver down and picked up a nail file.

The door to the headmaster’s office opened, and he stuck his head out. “Did I just hear a student out here, Marilyn?”

“No, of course not. There’s nothing to worry about, sir,” she said. “Nothing to worry about at all.”



In his dorm room, Fiske pulled a bag from beneath his bed. Grace had told him to always keep one packed. He’d rolled his eyes when she said it, but as a Cahill, he didn’t really have a choice in the matter. He pulled off his damp sweater and changed into a clean black one. Outside, the sun was falling down behind the trees. It wouldn’t be fully dark for a few more hours, but he didn’t have that kind of time. He’d have to go now.

Fiske put his ear to the door; in the hall, boys were heading to dinner or to study. He could say he was going to the library, but the library was closed during dinner and everyone knew that. He could say he was headed to the field houses, but no one would believe that.

On his dresser was a framed photograph, taken last Christmas. Fiske was in the corner, per usual, looking awkward and half hidden in shadow. His father, a stern-faced and silent man, sat on a chair in the center of the frame. His sister Beatrice was beside him, a smile pressed into her face so unnaturally it was as if someone had to arrange her mouth and chin just to show her how it might work. And then there was Grace, beaming and full of so much life that she practically made the picture move. She was turned toward him, her arms outstretched, trying to pull Fiske into the forefront. Grace was twelve years older than him, but he had never felt any distance between the two of them. They weren't much, that family. They were fractured and imperfect. Two of them, actually, were rather dysfunctional and not very nice. But they were still his.

He picked up the frame and gazed at it for a moment longer.

Fiske glanced behind him. There was always the window.

He threw the curtains back and lifted the sash. There was no one below, but he was still two stories from the ground. He looked at his watch; the dinner bell would ring soon.

With a grunt, Fiske threw his bag out the window toward the trees. It landed with a crash in the underbrush, and he winced at the noise. But it didn't seem that anyone heard it. So hopefully no one would notice the freshman climbing out of the window, either.

Doing something he once read about in a book, Fiske took the sheets off of his bed and knotted them together. It didn't seem like a very long rope, and it looked even shorter by the time he'd tied a corner of it to his dresser. People in his books must have more bedclothes than he did. Still, he threw the end of his sheet rope out the window.

And there were still a good seven or eight feet between the end of it and the ground.

He climbed onto the windowsill and wrapped his legs around the sheets. The dresser wobbled a bit as he slowly edged his way down the homemade rope. The sheets began to slip their knots. Fiske wavered, his arms and legs shaking so hard that he could have been the victim of the world's tiniest earthquake. He tried to

scramble down before the sheets fell or the dresser toppled out the window, but it didn't work. He lost his grip, and before he understood what was happening, Fiske's arms and legs were flailing through nothing but air. He landed on his back, and all of the breath flew out of him.

It took a minute of lying there in the bushes and grass to get his breath back, but he jumped up as soon as he could. Now what? The airport was a good five miles away, at least.

Beyond the tree line was a row of faculty houses, residences specifically set aside for teachers with families. And there, leaning against a back porch, was a bicycle with streamers on the handlebars and a pink plastic basket.

Of course, he thought. *Of course it would be an eight-year-old girl's bike.* It couldn't be a moped or something cool.

He swung his leg over the pink banana seat, mentally promised the little girl that he'd get the bike back to her, and then sped off down a service road.

But there was someone waiting for him there.

The secretary stood in the middle of the street, her hands on her hips and a very disapproving look on her face.

"I should have known you would try to sneak away. It's incredibly rude to do something when you've been told you don't have permission."

"How did you know that I — how — I'm, I'm sorry," said Fiske. "But I have to go."

"Oh, to your sister. I know, darling boy. But you really shouldn't worry about her. She's with some friends of mine, and they're just dying to talk to her." The secretary smiled in that not-very-friendly way of hers.

Fiske felt as if he had been washed in snow. The secretary's friends? There was a Vesper working at his school?

"We're everywhere, Mr. Cahill," said the secretary. "Don't think that we're not. Now, I know you're a good boy. You'd much rather be sketching your family tree than trying to live up to it and never doing so, am I right? Of course I am. So, get off the bicycle. Let your sister put out her own fires. And perhaps you'll live to see another day."

A part of Fiske crumbled, like a piece of a cliff tumbling down into the sea. He stared at the secretary with her red suit, her gray hair curled into a little iron helmet. He put his foot back on the pedal.

The secretary lifted a finger. "I'm giving you a chance. You're a snotty little Cahill, but you're just a boy. The others won't be as forgiving. The others would kill you as

soon as they looked at you, Fiske Cahill. Don't think they don't know where you're going, or who you'll see."

Fiske pushed off. He tried to gain as much speed as he could, whipping past the secretary. She yelled out at him, turning and chasing him down the road. Her scarlet claws grabbed at the back of his sweater, but he sped away.

He didn't want a chance to turn around. He didn't want to be delayed. He knew that the secretary would run back to her desk and call whoever it was that she had to call, but he couldn't worry about any of that right now. He needed to get to Grace, and they would handle it together.

He had a sister to save.



Meriden was the nearest airport, and while it was ten minutes away by car, it took considerably longer to get there through the wooded paths at dusk, on a small girl's bicycle. Fiske didn't dare use the main road.

There were some old paths through the forest that some of the older boys used when they were sneaking out; Fiske followed one of those. His teeth clattered against one another from fear and from the cold.

He didn't have a lot of time; he knew the Vespers would be waiting, looking for him. They could be crawling all over the small airport in the quickly falling darkness.

The airport was sleepy and dark when he arrived at the security gate. The watchman was napping, but he opened his eyes when Fiske rapped on the window.

"I need to use the Cahill plane," he said. "It's an emergency."

The security guard wiped his nose and buzzed Fiske onto the airport grounds. The Cahills had kept a plane at Meriden and a pilot on retainer. He was available at any hour that Fiske or Grace might need him. This was another family precaution that Fiske had huffed and moaned about, but Grace's choices were becoming more and more clear. Everything was about the Clue hunt — whether Fiske agreed with that set of priorities or not. He bit his lip. It wasn't fair to think that way, but he couldn't help it.

Fiske rode his bike to the hangar. Pete, the pilot, was wiping down the Cahill plane's nose with a cloth. Pete had been in dogfights in World War II. The danger had made him nearly fearless, but possibly a bit crazy. Which, in turn, made him an excellent Cahill ally.

“Well, hey there, young Cahill,” said Pete. “Thought I wouldn’t be seeing you until the end of term.”

“F-family emergency,” said Fiske. “I need to go to Washington, DC. Right — right away.”

“Right away, eh? Glad you made it here now; a few minutes more and I’d be having myself some dinner.”

“I’m sorry to keep you from your dinner, Pete, but it really can’t wait. Not another minute.”

“Well, then. Good thing we’ve got peanuts on board. Go ahead and get yourself all settled there. I’ll get the garage door up here and we’ll be off like a flash.”

“Thank you, Pete,” said Fiske, pulling the plane’s door open and climbing in.

It was a small airplane — a two-seater cockpit with four seats in the cabin — not something that Fiske would really trust to take him across the ocean, or really any farther than the Great Lakes. But from Connecticut to Washington, or Connecticut to home, it was okay. And quick. Fiske put his bag in the cabin, but climbed into the cockpit beside Pete’s captain’s chair. He didn’t want to sit alone — it seemed rude.

Pete had the hangar door up and the engines on in record time, and soon they were taxiing out to the small runway.

“How’s landing at Hyde for you, young Cahill?” asked Pete.

“That’s fine, thanks,” said Fiske. He was staring out the window. A pair of headlights was on the runway. “Pete, are cars allowed on the runway?”

“Nope,” said Pete, checking his gauges and dials from the cockpit. “Not usually, at least. ’Less it’s a maintenance crew or something like that.” Pete and Fiske squinted at the headlights. They looked like they were coming straight toward the plane.

“Pete, let’s go!” Fiske said. An uncomfortable thought had lodged itself in his imagination, and it wasn’t going to let go. “We’ve got to go before they get here.”

“If someone’s on the runway — and good golly, they are — we can’t take off. We’ll run into them. And that won’t end well for anyone,” said Pete, lifting his eyebrows.

That’s when there was a flash and a *pop*.

“They’re shooting at us,” Fiske said, his panic growing like a balloon about to burst. “Oh, holy pancakes, they’re shooting at us. Pete, we have to go!”

“They’re shooting at us!” Pete yelled, his gaze darting nervously between the view through the windshield and the gauges in the cockpit.

“They’re shooting at us, Pete, they’re shooting at us! Go, go faster!” Fiske yelled. He felt as if he were climbing and clawing the cockpit. There was another flash and another *pop*, and Fiske covered his eyes, as if that would keep him from dying.

The airplane’s engines roared to full power. Pete pulled back on the throttle, and the plane began to move.

“Go, Pete, go faster!”

“I’m going fast! I’m going as fast as physics lets me!” Pete yelled.

Fiske glanced over at his pilot — Pete’s teeth were clenched together and a bead of sweat was making his way down his face. They were going faster and faster, and the car was nearer and nearer.

“Hope your seat belt is on, young Cahill!” said Pete. He pulled on the steering wheel and they pointed upward. Fiske looked out the side of the cockpit, and he saw men in the car — he saw their faces, their guns. The plane lifted, but too slowly. The fuselage shuddered and jerked as the back landing gear scraped the top of the car. Fiske was thrown around like a doll; his seat belt locked and so his head flew forward, his elbow jammed into the windshield. The plane wobbled like it was balanced on the head of a pin, and the popping continued below.

They weren’t even going to make it off the runway. Fiske’s emergency trip would be over before it even started. Pete was yelling something in French — probably something he’d picked up in the war — and all Fiske could do was hold on to whatever was at hand.

And then, the jerking stopped. The air around them was smooth. The plane wasn’t falling out of the sky.

“That was a close one there, wasn’t it?” said Pete, grinning. “We should do that more often. That’s a good kind of flying! Makes me feel like a younger man, you know. Back in the war again. Ah, that’s some good kind of flying!”

Fiske collapsed back into his chair and let out the breath he had been holding. Hopefully the rest of his adventure would go smoothly.



The Willard Hotel was an unofficial Cahill institution. Practically across the street from the White House, it could be argued to be the real seat of power in the country. It was a rare day when there wasn’t at least one Cahill checked in.

Grace Cahill had spent many a day and night there. She didn't think she had ever been so frightened, though.

She was pacing, checking the peephole of her hotel room every few minutes. Her nerves were standing on end, and a black swirl of dread circled around in her chest. She shouldn't have sent that telegram. She should have found a way out on her own. But, as unwilling as Grace was to admit it, she was terrified, in over her head. She hated to drag her little brother into this mess, this pit of vipers and fire. But she didn't have a choice.

Grace checked the peephole again and then the window. He should be here by now. Fears and what-ifs breathed down her neck like unhappy ghosts. Suppose they'd caught up with him. Suppose they'd captured him, delayed him, were planning on using him as bait to lure her out. Perhaps they'd done worse —

She stopped her pacing and pressed her palms against her closed eyes. *It doesn't do any good to think like that. It doesn't do any good to do anything but hope.*

She glanced at the clock on the nightstand. Grace tried to remind herself that not everything happened on a smooth timetable. There could have been any number of small obstacles that came up. Still, it was getting late.

There was a knock, and Grace flew to the door, peering out the peephole. Fiske stood on the other side. But was it really Fiske? Had he been followed? She hated, sometimes, that her life made her doubt even the plainest of facts.

"Who's there?" Grace demanded.

"It's me," he said. "It's Fiske."

"When's your birthday?"

"February 9, 1941," said Fiske. "Let me in, Grace."

"No," said Grace. "That was too easy. What's your favorite animal? What's my favorite animal?"

"Mine is a giraffe," said Fiske. "Yours is a dragon. Which, you know, isn't even a real thing. Let me in!"

"What color is the carpet in the second-floor music room at home?"

"Grace!" he half shouted, half hissed. "Well, it used to be white. And then I spilled that green paint on it, so now it's kind of . . . spotted. And I said I was sorry about that, by the way. There's no need to keep bringing it up. Grace, come on and let me in."

Satisfied, Grace slid the chain lock open, turned the deadbolt, opened the door, and grabbed her brother by the collar. She dragged him in and immediately shut the door after him, sliding and turning all of the locks back into place.

“Grace, why is it so dark in here?” asked Fiske. The curtains were pulled against the night, and the only lamp on was a small reading light that Grace had put on the floor.

“They know I’m here,” she said, peeking out of the peephole again. “How did you know what room I was in?”

“I asked for Miss Edith at the front desk,” said Fiske. It was their mother’s name, and a good pseudonym. Fiske watched Grace with nervous eyes. He’d never seen her so scared before.

“Right,” said Grace. She took a towel from the bathroom and stuffed it along the crack at the bottom of the door.

“Grace? Grace,” Fiske said, but she didn’t look up. “Grace!” Fiske grabbed her arm and only then did she stop, turning to him with the most anxious expression he’d ever seen. “What’s going on?” asked Fiske. “You’re scaring me. You need to just . . . to just sit there, okay? Just sit down.” He helped to ease her down onto the corner of one of the beds and then perched on the corner across from her. “We’ll be okay for five minutes, right?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “They’ve never been this close before, Fiske. Not to me. I can feel them — I can feel them breathing down my neck, and it’s as if no matter where I go they’re already there. I’d say it was ridiculous to think that they were reading my thoughts, but who knows what kinds of tricks they’ve come up with lately?”

Goose bumps prickled over Fiske, up and around his scalp. “How — how close?” he asked.

Grace shook her head. “I don’t want to worry you.”

“Grace,” said Fiske. “We are hiding out in a hotel in the middle of Washington, DC, after you sent an urgent telegram to my school saying that you were surrounded by Vespers. I think I’m already pretty worried.”

“Fiske,” said Grace. Her voice was quiet and she didn’t look up at him. “I need your help.”

“What . . . what can *I* do?” Fiske asked. He wasn’t brave, like Grace. He wasn’t daring. He wasn’t whip smart or cool under pressure. He couldn’t even get the kids at

school to stop picking on him; there was no way he was capable of saving Grace. Especially if she was this scared.

Grace shook her head, her breath coming in shallow sips. She took Fiske's hand and pushed something cool and hard into it. He looked down at the slim gold ring in his palm.

"Grace? What? No!"

"You have to take it," she said, folding his fingers around it. "They know I'm here, and if they find me, then at least they won't find that. It's the most important thing, Fiske, to keep the ring safe."

"Not more important than you!" said Fiske, shoving the ring back at her. "I don't want it."

"It is," said Grace. "It's more important than me. It's more important than any of us. It's the future of the world there in your hand, Fiske. You have to keep it safe. No one will expect you to have it. And that's how we'll protect it. At least, just for a few days. Until I can shake them. You can do that, can't you?"

"You . . . you want me to take the most important artifact in the world back to school with me?" asked Fiske. His face turned red. "The other day, someone stole all of my socks and threw them into the duck pond, Grace. I honestly don't think it will be safe at school."

"You're not going back to school," said Grace.

"I'm not?"

"I've made other arrangements." She stood up and turned away from him. "I just need a few days. I'll distract them. I'll take them far away from you."

"But if they catch you —"

"Then I won't have the ring. They won't win. Fiske," said Grace, "I need you to trust me, the way that I'm trusting you. I wouldn't ask you to do this if I didn't think that you could — if I didn't think that you had it in you."

Fiske didn't think that was entirely true. He thought she was trusting him because there was no one else she could turn to. Everything in him was pooling in his feet, like he was a bathtub being drained.

"We have to keep it safe," said Grace. "So I'm sending you somewhere safe."

"Where?"

Grace paused. It made Fiske's stomach drop.

“You’ll be posing as the grandson of Admiral King. You’ve met him before — you liked him, remember? You’ll have a place aboard the USS *Nautilus*,” said Grace.

“What’s that?” asked Fiske.

“Oh, well, it’s very interesting that you should ask,” said Grace. She fiddled with her necklace. “It’s a nuclear submarine. The first one, actually. Another Cahill, right on the cusp of history. We’re all very proud.”

Fiske went pale; he could feel the blood leave his face and a deathly chill rush up to replace it. A submarine? A submarine with a nuclear reactor on board?

“Everything will be fine,” said Grace. “Now, what did you pack? Do you have enough clean underwear?”

“A nuclear submarine!” Fiske yelled. “Grace? Really?”

“Keep your voice down!” Grace hissed, rushing to him and clamping a hand over Fiske’s mouth. “I’m not kidding, Fiske. This isn’t a drill, and it’s not some sort of prank. This is my life, and your life, and the future of the world. This is what I need you to do. If you don’t . . . then I’m out of options, Fiske. Then they win.”

Fiske shuddered involuntarily, and his stomach went cold and turned over. He wished that she could come with him, that she could hide out in a safe place, too.

“Just a few days?” Fiske said.

“Just a few days. You’ll be fine. I’ve taken care of everything. After you leave here I’ll let the Vespers know that I’m on the move again. They won’t know that I don’t have the ring. I have a fake one to wear in the meantime.”

Grace squeezed his hand tighter around the ring. “You’ll go to New London, Connecticut. From there, the *Nautilus* is sailing to Puerto Rico. Wherever I am, I’ll be monitoring that boat, Fiske. I’ll always be watching out for you. And once you’re in San Juan, I’ll send you word on where to meet me and I’ll take the ring back.” She paused again. “If you don’t hear from me . . .”

“Don’t say anything else. Don’t you dare finish that sentence.”

“If you don’t hear from me, then the ring will be yours. To do with what you want. You’re the only one I trust with it, Fiske.”

Fiske didn’t want to cry. He was fourteen years old, for goodness’ sake, and far too old to be doing something like that. And he wanted to be strong for Grace. He wanted her to know that she didn’t have to worry about him. That the only thing she should do is worry about herself, to keep herself safe.

“Fiske King will be your name on the boat,” Grace said. They stood up and Grace grabbed his shoulders and pulled him in for a hug. “You’ll be fine. You’ll be so fine you won’t be able to stand how fine you are. You understand?”

“Please don’t die,” said Fiske. He couldn’t help it. He didn’t want to say it; he didn’t want to give voice to the idea. “Please don’t. If it comes down to anything at all, if you have to make a choice, you make the choice that means you don’t die. You understand me, Grace Cahill? You are not leaving me here alone.”

“I would never,” she said. “Not for anything.”

She hugged him hard, then gave him his bag and ushered him out into the hallway, locking the door again behind him. Fiske took a cap out of his bag and pulled it low over his eyes as he made his way down to the lobby and out the doors into a rainy night.

Fiske stood outside of the hotel with his bag over his shoulder and the most valuable thing in the world in his pocket. If he had felt vulnerable before, now he felt as if he was walking around with a giant red and white bull’s-eye painted on his back. The street was nearly empty, but he could feel dozens of eyes peering at him, poking at him like razor-sharp sticks.

Grace would flee the hotel via the freight elevator, and he wouldn’t see her until next week. Until he resurfaced from his aquatic adventure.

That is, if he resurfaced at all.



The next morning, the morning of May 10, 1955, the world was sparkling. The sun glinted off of the harbor, making the water look like a rolling pool of diamonds. The air was crisp and salty, and even though he was still officially on land, Fiske felt certain that he was about to be seasick.

There she was. The *Nautilus*. As long as one of the football fields at school and made of smooth steel, she was the most incredible and terrible thing that Fiske had ever seen. The hull was dark and matte and half-wet from the lapping water, half-dry from the warm spring sun. Seagulls perched on the antennae and the periscope, all of them admirals in their own minds. Men in bright white uniforms bustled around, hauling coils of rope over their shoulders or heaving bags of potatoes in a long line from a truck to a hatch at the top of the submarine. Boatloads of American-themed bunting hung around and from everything — the submarine itself, the supply trucks,

the dock's office doors; Fiske was at least in no danger of forgetting what country he was in. He stood beneath a great patriotic swath above the office door, waiting for a lieutenant and hoping he wouldn't get lost.

All of the activity swirled around in front of Fiske like the whorls in wood around a central knot. The crowd there to see the submarine off was enormous. There were women in new hats and stiff gloves, children with balloons on strings tied to their wrists. Old men yelled at one another to be heard over the sound of other men yelling. The air smelled of salt and fish and people and damp.

Fiske was frozen in place, with no idea of where to go or who to look at or if he was supposed to talk to anyone. He hoped he wasn't. Because all he wanted to do was get back into the car and drive it straight down to the bottom of the sea.

A pamphlet on the *Nautilus* was twisted in his hands, the paper damp from his sweaty palms. He had been in to the office, had introduced himself as Fiske King, and had had to shake so many hands he thought his own might fall off. Now he was waiting for a man named Herman Oppowitz to show up and help him out.

"Ahoy there!" A short, stocky man in blue coveralls came jogging out of the dock's office. He had buzzed hair, a huge smile, and shoulders so wide he looked like he might be half Texas longhorn. Fiske would have liked him, if he wasn't so scared.

The man grinned and saluted. "You must be Admiral King's grandson. It's an honor to meet you." He stuck his hand out. "Lieutenant Herman Oppowitz. I'll be your chaperone and answer man for your time on the *Nautilus*. Your sea dad, as we call it."

Fiske took his hand; it was so large that it covered Fiske's up to his wrist. "Uh, hello, sir," said Fiske, in a voice so small that it made him blush. "Nice to meet you, too."

"I hear you're awful interested in submarines," said Lieutenant Oppowitz. "That's just great. You know your grandfather served on one back in the twenties? Of course you do. Boy-o, I bet you've got stories. Well, let's get you aboard. Want me to take your bag?"

"No!" Fiske blurted, clutching his bag tighter to his chest. "No. No thank you, I mean."

"Sure thing, kid," said Lieutenant Oppowitz. Fiske could tell he was trying to not look at Fiske as if he was the weirdest kid that the lieutenant had ever met. The lieutenant scratched behind his ear. "So, yeah, let's go on down."

There was a gangplank from the dock to the flat top of the submarine, and then a hatch that was propped open. A ladder dropped down from there, leading into the dark of the submarine. Fiske followed the lieutenant over the gangplank and onto the submarine's top. He expected it to wobble — like he was getting on a sailboat — but it was still and heavy in the water.

“This way, Mr. King!” said Lieutenant Oppowitz, gesturing at the hatch. There was a small ladder to a level platform and then, through another hole in the floor, a much longer ladder that led down into the belly of the boat.

Fiske looked down the hatch at the thirty-foot ladder, swallowed hard, and went down into the deep.



The young sailor sat in the car, a pair of binoculars held to his eyes. “That’s him?” he asked. The boy was small and skinny; he’d be easy to find again among the ranks of muscle-bound military personnel.

“Yes,” said the driver. “I know it wasn’t part of your original mission, but it seems that it’s become necessary.”

“Don’t worry,” said the sailor. “I can handle it.”

“You have to,” said the driver.

“I said I can do it,” the other snapped. He flung the car door open and stormed out, grabbing his bag and slinging it over his shoulder. It was heavier than he expected, though, and he nearly dropped it. The driver closed his eyes and shook his head. The sailor flushed a deep scarlet.

“You nervous?” asked the driver. “It’s your first mission.”

“No,” said the sailor. “I’m not nervous at all. I know what’s expected of me. I’m fully capable of succeeding.”

“Don’t forget this,” said the driver. He passed the sailor-turned-Vesper a device with a long barrel, a handle, and a trigger. At the end of the barrel were two wires. The sailor took it and stuffed it in his bag. “Remember: Learn everything. And then kill the Cahill.”

He nodded. Kill the Cahill. It would be nothing at all, to kill the Cahill.



The hatch was small, and the ladder dropped straight down. Fiske was afraid he would slip and accidentally kick Lieutenant Oppowitz in the face, or fall on top of him. After all, his last try at climbing down something hadn't turned out so well.

"Sorry!" he blurted when his foot slipped, knocking into the lieutenant's hand. This was going to be a disaster. He couldn't even get *into* the submarine without nearly wrecking everything.

"Nothing to worry about," said the lieutenant, pausing to shake the sting out of his hand before continuing down the ladder.

Below, the world was so much smaller than Fiske thought it would be. The ceilings were low and the hallways narrow. Equipment hummed and monitors beeped all around him. He didn't think that Lieutenant Oppowitz would be able to walk down the hall without getting stuck, but the officer moved like, well, a fish in water.

"This is the maneuvering room," said Lieutenant Oppowitz. "Through that door there are the engines. Here is where we control the speed and the propulsion and all of that."

Fiske followed along, trying not to stare. Maybe he wasn't exactly interested in submarines, but that could change. This was a masterful piece of machinery, a perfectly tuned instrument of war. At least, that's what it looked like. It was brightly lit and shining, like a new quarter. Like a very huge, very expensive, very deadly new quarter.

At the same time, it looked and felt almost unfinished. Wires and circuits and screens were stuck out in plain sight, with no panels to cover their guts. Passing people in the halls meant that someone had to flatten himself against a wall.

"This is the nuclear reactor," Lieutenant Oppowitz was saying, and that's when Fiske almost fell over. They had passed through to another room, and there it was: the humming, throbbing heart of the boat. It didn't look like much: just a great metal block with pipes leading in and out of it. He stared at it, and then at his skin, half expecting to see new limbs sprouting up all over the place, or scales, or a clone springing forth. "No need to worry about anything here," said the lieutenant. "There's a lot of steel between you and me and that overgrown battery. We'll make sure you get back to your grandfather in one piece. We're the top two percent of the Navy, Seaman King. No one's going to take a risk at radiating a mind this sharp." He winked and tapped his temple. "Oh, some of the others, sure, but I'm here as a safety measure for all of that. Right? Ha! Right?"

Fiske almost smiled. That was a relief, at least.

“Through here is the mess and the cold storage. You’ll be having your meals here, and spending any leisure time. You’ll want to be around for meals. Best food under the sea — and above it, too. We don’t have too much to brag about down here — it’s cramped and dark and let me tell you it’ll start to smell after a day or less — but there’s nothing that beats the food.”

Fiske looked around. The tables were long and narrow. Everything felt as if it had been shrunk by half. In a way, it was nice. He almost felt swaddled, like it was too small of a space for anything bad to creep into. There was simply no room.

“That through there is the head, and up above there is the control room. Anything that happens down here happens right up there. I’ll have to ask you, politely you know, to keep any curious fingers away from any buttons they might want to push. Not that I think you would — but it’s a condition of your trip.”

“Of course,” said Fiske. As if he would want to push any buttons at all. He’d be perfectly content to sit on his bunk for the next few days and not mess about with anything.

Even though he was here — and a full twenty minutes into his mission — he still felt unprepared. Still, there was something about it that was . . . *exciting*. Maybe this was what it was like to be Grace — to be half-terrified and yet half-thrilled. There was something arming about it; something that made him feel like he could do anything.

“This way to your bunk. We’re set to launch in about twenty minutes. Exciting, isn’t it? I’ve seen a lot, you know, been around the world a couple of times. But a nuclear submarine! We’re going to go the whole way from Connecticut to Puerto Rico underwater. The whole way! I’ve been underwater before, in the diesel boats, but the whole way — boy, I’ve never heard anything like it,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. Fiske thought he practically puffed up his chest, like a proud bird about to fly. “And so are you, you know,” he added.

“I — I know,” said Fiske. Oh, didn’t he know.

“This here is your suite,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. They’d traveled down a narrow stairway and were in a skinny room lined with bunks. There was scarcely eighteen inches from mattress to mattress, and only a little curtain to pull for any kind of privacy. Folded on top of Fiske’s bunk were two pairs of blue coveralls. “These here are your pooppy suits.”

“My what?!” Fiske said, trying hard not to giggle. But there was something unmistakably funny about a naval officer saying the word *poopy*.

“Poopy suits,” said the lieutenant, his own eyes twinkling with a suppressed laugh. “I know. I can’t help it, either. I’ve got a son that gets a kick out of it, too. Walk-in closet is here,” and he lifted the mattress to reveal a small drawer for Fiske’s things.

“Thank you,” said Fiske, his voice a little squeak. This was happening. It was all really happening. He was going to live on a submarine.

“You don’t talk much, do you?” said the lieutenant. Fiske turned pink. “Ah, that’s okay. Nothing to be ashamed of. What is it they say? Better to keep your mouth shut and be foolish, or keep it closed and be a fool? Something like that? I don’t know. But you’re a smart kid, I see that.”

“Thanks,” said Fiske again, fiddling with the strap on his bag.

“I’ll leave you to get your things put away,” the lieutenant said. “The other boys have already been down — they’ll be getting to their stations soon enough. I’ll come and grab you once we’re at sea. I’ve something incredible to show you. We can finish looking around, and I’ll be able to answer any questions you might have. It would be a real honor, to be at sea with someone like Admiral King. I’ll bet it’s just as much an honor to set to sea with his grandson.” Lieutenant Oppowitz stuck out his hand, and Fiske took it with a bit of hesitation.

As soon as the lieutenant was gone, Fiske ripped his bag open and set about digging through it. He knew it was in there; he knew because he had laughed when Grace had made him pack it but now it was going to come in so handy he could hardly stand it.

And there it was: a small sewing kit. A missing button didn’t seem like it would put humanity at risk, but there was something about the Clue hunt that could make a person look at the world in a different way. Now this sewing kit was going above and beyond its call in life.

Fiske grabbed a poopy suit and the ring from his pocket and as best he could — which wasn’t very good, but would do — he sewed the ring into the front of the suit. He stored the other set and his other clothes beneath the mattress; he wasn’t going to take the suit off for anything.

He was just buttoning his poopy suit when another boy entered the bunks. He didn’t seem that much older than Fiske.

“That your bunk there?” the boy asked. Fiske nodded, smoothing the creases out of his suit. It was clean and blue and made him feel like a proper seaman. And there was the ring, tugging slightly on the fabric of his suit like a tiny little anchor.

The boy threw his own bag atop a different mattress. “They don’t give us much room, do they? Better not have a nightmare or end up sleepwalking, right?”

“Sure,” said Fiske, but the other sailor kept talking.

“This your first time going down below?” asked the boy. Fiske nodded.

“It’s my first time going down, too. I just graduated from sub school. Of course, there’s still a lot of work to do. I’m just a puke. That’s what they call the new submariners. It’s exciting, isn’t it? A nuclear sub, and it’s just my first trip. Amazing how they can take something like the bomb and turn it into a way to power things. Not that you could pay me to go near that reactor. I’ll be in the control room — far, far away. Very far. Legions. Do you have a specialty?”

“Oh,” said Fiske. “N-no. I’m — no.”

“Ah, I heard a rumor about you. Well, once you’re on a submarine, doesn’t that make you a submariner, even just a little bit?” asked the boy. He pulled his mattress back down. “Welcome aboard. I’m sure you’ll be a fine addition to the crew.”

Fiske blushed and muttered thanks, even though he was sure it made him look silly and he wanted to look brave and serious in front of the real Navy men. “You, too.”

“Oh, well, thank you,” said the other boy. “Should we head to the mess? I think everyone is gathering before the launch.”

“Sure,” said Fiske. “I’m Fiske, by the way. Fiske Ca — King. Fiske King.” He put out his hand.

“Nice to meet you, Fiske King,” said the boy, shaking his hand. “I’m George.”



Fiske and George were making their way to the mess hall when Lieutenant Oppowitz hailed them from the galley.

“Oh, Fiske!” Lieutenant Oppowitz lifted his arm and waved Fiske over. Fiske, feeling rather sailorlike in his crisp blue pooppy suit, went willingly. It was easy to slip into a role when you had a costume for it. “We’ve more of our tour to get on with.” He led Fiske off down another narrow hall. “Did you know that the *Nautilus* is the first submarine to have a staircase on it? Look at us! It’s like a five-star hotel down here.”

Lieutenant Oppowitz charged up the stairs like a rhinoceros and Fiske trailed behind him. It was easy to follow the lieutenant — Fiske could hear him coming and going no matter where his eyes had wandered — and it was easier to like him. He talked enough for both of them, and Fiske didn't feel a need to fill any awkward silences.

The stairs led to the control room. If Fiske had thought that the other halls and rooms in the *Nautilus* had been complex, they were put to shame by the control room. The entire room was bustling, like a giant robot brain that was half-human, half-machine. Every inch of space was telling some sort of story about the boat: the depth, the outside and inside pressure and temperatures, speed and direction, sonar readings, oxygen levels. A sailor not much older than Fiske sat in front of what looked like a steering wheel, his eyes on the small monitor just above the wheel.

Standing in the middle of the crowd was a short man with dark hair and an intelligent face. "Fiske, may I introduce you to Commander Eugene P. Wilkinson, United States Navy," said Lieutenant Oppowitz. Commander Wilkinson stuck out his hand for Fiske to take. Fiske thought he looked like he might be a literature professor, or a man who sold well-made hats, not a naval commander. "Commander Wilkinson is the boss of the submarine, so to speak. If you don't mind my being so informal about it, sir."

"Not at all, Lieutenant. Pleasure to meet you, Fiske King," said the commander when Fiske took his hand. "I hope you understand what kind of privilege you have being down here, young man."

"I do, sir," said Fiske, his voice catching on something dry in his throat. "Yes. Nice to, um, meet you, too."

"A lot of young men would kill for the opportunity," said the commander. "I hope you'll learn a lot while you're down here. I hope you'll be a credit to your family name."

"I — I do, too."

The commander seemed satisfied by this and turned back to the business of the control room. "All right, then. Ranker, the engines are ready?"

"Yes, sir," said a sailor.

"Let's make this a good one. I want to blow them all away. Let's cast off."

Ranker flipped a switch that sent a hum through the boat, and put the radio at his side to his mouth. "Underway on nuclear power."

“We’re moving?” asked Fiske. He could barely feel it. He expected the boat to lurch, to plunge down into the depths.

“We sure are,” said the lieutenant. He pointed to the sonar screen. A sailor stood with a pad of paper before him and a pencil in hand. He watched the screen and made a note every few beeps. The bottom of the harbor beeped along, alerting the room to every lump of sand, every dip in the seafloor.

Fiske watched in fascination. It was something like a dance, with the commander calling out the steps and each of the sailors stepping around the floor with their screen, their map, their control panel.

It made him feel safe. Nothing bad could happen down here. Someone would notice the moment that anyone was out of step, and then it would be corrected immediately. There was simply no room for error.

Lieutenant Oppowitz called him out of his thoughts, his openmouthed gazing at the control room.

“Ready for something even better?” asked the lieutenant.

“Better than this?” Fiske asked. The lieutenant grinned and nodded.

“There’s nothing like it,” he said. “Especially the first time you see it. It’s my favorite thing, to take a puke up here.”

Fiske followed obligingly as they made their way back to where they had first entered the sub. Lieutenant Oppowitz climbed up the ladder, a great dark block above Fiske. And then, with a quick scramble, he was gone. And all he left behind was a pure blue circle of sky.

Fiske followed, and the first thing that hit him was the smell of the air. It was clear, cut through with salt and water. He pulled himself out and he was swallowed up by the blueness of it all.

The *Nautilus* was slicing through the water. The sky above was cloudless and a perfect, clear blue that Fiske thought he might reach up and touch. The wind was strong and he was a bit cold, but it seemed a small price to pay for this exhilaration.

There were no railings around the top of the submarine; there was nothing between him and the rippling water. The nose of the submarine was blunt and round, and it didn’t pierce the waves like the prow of a ship. Instead of a crisp slice through the water with a foaming V spreading behind the boat, the water bubbled and rolled away from the hull in great white plumes.

Fiske had to hold his arms out to keep his balance, but the other sailors went about their duties on top of the submarine as if they had grown up on the thing. They checked the antennae sprouting from the periscope tower and bundled up the rope that had held the gangplank in place, but a few of them just stood there to watch the horizon. Fiske couldn't blame them. The wind whipped the loose fabric of his poopysuit around and pitched his well-combed hair into a bird's nest. He felt like a bird, like any moment he would take off and leave the whole world behind. He'd swoop around in the clouds and drop in on Grace, stealing her away from whatever was breathing down her neck.

Grace. His arms dropped. How could he even think of having a good time when she was out there, risking her life for the ring? He put his hand on his chest; it was there.

"They'll want their last bit of good sea air before we're all stuffed down under like a bunch of stinking sardines," said Lieutenant Oppowitz, gesturing at the sailors. "Sometimes I wish we could hover about and do some good fishing. You ever been fishing on the Mississippi, Fiske?"

"Uh, no, sir," said Fiske.

"Best fishing there is. There're people who will try to tell you that nothing beats the ocean, and sure, it's nice. But there's nothing like that slow old river with your own son at your knee and a worm on the line." The lieutenant threw his arms out wide and waved them back and forth, stretching the muscles in his neck and back. "Won't be able to do that again for some time, right?"

Below, the Klaxon sounded and the sailors began to pull themselves away from their duties.

"That's the call to come on inside," said Lieutenant Oppowitz. "We'll be going down soon. Certainly wouldn't want to be caught out here when that happened!"

"No, no, not at all," Fiske said, hurriedly following the lieutenant back into the boat. Not that he really thought that the sub would go underwater with a dozen of the crew members above decks. But just in case, he wanted to be well away from any doors or hatches when it happened.

The last man down screwed the hatch shut tight. Now, Fiske thought, absolutely nothing else could get into the boat.

It didn't cross his mind that this meant he couldn't get out.



In the mess below, Lieutenant Oppowitz flagged down a sailor and called him over.

“Fiske, this is Petty Officer Third Class Ralph Kane. Everyone has to earn his keep down here, you know, so you’ll be helping Ralph out. Ralph is a missile technician. You’ll be spending a lot of time in the torpedo room.”

Ralph was tall and broad and looked the part of a sailor. He offered a hand to Fiske. “Pleasure to meet you.” Though Fiske thought it might not be all that much of a pleasure. Ralph looked a bit annoyed, like someone had just made him the most lethal babysitter under the sea.

“You, too,” said Fiske. “But I won’t be with you, Lieutenant?”

“You’ll be bored stiff with me,” said the lieutenant. “Ralph’s got the fun job. Not that I envy him, I swear it. My life is exciting enough just being on the boat. I don’t need to add torpedoes into it. Ralph here, Ralph on the other hand, he’s full of excitement and danger, isn’t he?”

“Yes, sir,” said Ralph. But Fiske didn’t agree. Ralph’s face was so serious, Fiske thought his idea of excitement and danger might be rearranging his rock collection.

“Very good,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. “Fiske, you’ll be in fine hands. Kane here is a top-notch sailor. Now, I’m off to report for duty. You stick with Ralph and he’ll keep you out of trouble.”

“Yes, sir,” said Fiske, fidgeting a little bit. He didn’t feel out of trouble next to Ralph. In fact, he felt very much *in* trouble, except he hadn’t done anything yet.

Ralph looked down at Fiske when the lieutenant walked away. Fiske flushed a deep scarlet and wished that he knew the right thing to say. If Ralph wanted, Fiske was perfectly willing to spend the next four days hiding in his bunk.

“S-so,” said Fiske, stumbling around in the awkward silence like a blind man in a fun house. “How deep does it go?”

Ralph looked annoyed again. “Well, if you were a real submariner, you would know that, wouldn’t you?” Ralph grabbed a sailor by the elbow — it was George. “Puke, how deep do we go?”

“Uh, uh,” said George. He had been just fine chatting with Fiske earlier, but now George’s face had turned a strange combination of milky pale with bright red spots. “Uh, that’s, uh, seven hundred feet. Sir. Uh, sir.”

“Hmph,” said Ralph. He turned his deadly serious glare onto Fiske. “This isn’t a cruise ship. This isn’t a vacation for anyone else. Down here, you’re going to have to

work like everybody else does. So don't mess around, and don't make me look bad. Got that?"

"Oh, um, sure. Yes." Fiske glanced at George, who raised his eyebrows. Fiske cracked a tiny smile.

And that was a mistake.

Ralph grabbed the collar of Fiske's poopy suit. Fiske's heart jumped into his throat; his only thought in that moment was for the ring. "Look," said Ralph. "I don't care whose grandson you are. Mess around down here, and I'll make you wish you never set foot on this boat. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," said Fiske, his heart beating too fast. "Yes. I understand."

"Good," said Ralph, letting go of Fiske after giving him a shove. "Let's get to work."

Fiske glanced at George again before following Ralph. George gave a little shrug. This was going to be interesting.



Life under the sea was good to Fiske. Namely because people beneath the water were so much nicer to him than his classmates had ever been. Excepting Ralph, sort of. Part of that was probably because they all thought they had to, because he was supposedly the grandson of a World War II hero, but he was willing to look beyond that if it meant some peace.

It was easy to acclimate himself to the structured life on the submarine. There were six hours of sleep on, admittedly, a tiny and not very comfortable bunk. Then six hours of torpedo duty with Ralph. Someone must have told him about "Fiske King's" interest in submarines and to be indulgent of that, because Ralph was full of lectures: about torpedoes and how serious a job he had, about gauges and dials, about the nobility of the submarine.

"Just like a whale," Ralph said. "There is nothing more noble than a whale."

"Sure," agreed Fiske.

"*Nothing.*"

"I agree!"

Since this trip on the *Nautilus* was just a shakedown to get all of her kinks out before taking her out on real missions, there wasn't too much to worry about, in terms of shooting at things. Still, every day, Ralph was there, checking gauges and

pressure readings. He arrived for shifts early and was the last one to leave at the end. Fiske thought he probably sang lullabies to the missiles when no one was looking.

After his shift in the torpedo room, Ralph would head to the mess to study. He was nearly through all of his qualifications. One more test and he'd earn his Dolphins — he'd be a full submariner with all of the duty and respect that came with that. Seeing as how he was supposed to be so interested in submarines, Fiske would join him there, as would George when he was off duty.

George was just starting to study for his quals, but he knew so much already. More than Ralph, in fact.

Ralph would stare at a page in his study guide, his mouth moving slowly as he read the words, one by one in his head. George shot off submarine trivia like a rocket, and he sped through his qual calculations and short-answer study questions as if they were the easiest things in the world for him.

The numbers and symbols that George scratched out on paper left Fiske blinking in confusion.

“You could have gone to Harvard,” said Fiske. “I mean, you could have gone to MIT. But you're here.”

George shrugged. “I have a duty to serve,” he said.

“Wh-what about you?” Fiske asked Ralph. Ralph lifted his eyes, gave Fiske a look, and then went back to his books.

And so far, after two days on the submarine, the ring had stayed a secret. Fiske had been quite serious about not taking off his pooppy suit for anything. And though he knew he was beginning to smell, he couldn't be bothered by that. Namely, he told himself, it was because the chemicals on board the submarine that sucked up the carbon dioxide were aversely affected by deodorant, and with a crew of over one hundred men, no deodorant, and very limited hot water supplies, *everyone* smelled.

Fiske was probably the worst of them all. The other guys jumped, yelping, into the icy showers for a few seconds, but Fiske was adamant. He wasn't taking off his suit for anything. But at least he kept washing his hair and brushing his teeth.

He was rubbing a towel over his head when he walked to the bunks. And when he put the towel down, he froze in his place.

His bunk was a mess. It had been thrown open. The sheets had been ripped off and the cubby beneath ransacked. His bag, his socks and underwear, his few toiletries were strewn all over the floor.

Nothing else in the room had been touched.

Fiske's hand flew to his chest, and he pressed the firmness of the ring into his skin. It was there. It was right there against him — not lost, not stolen.

Still, the sight sent chills up his neck; the skin on his scalp prickled like he had just dunked his head back into the icy shower. Someone had been looking for something in his bunk.

There was no reason for that, unless someone knew who he *really* was.

Fiske wasn't going to panic. He was at least going to try not to. But he could feel his fears jerk awake inside of him, like Frankenstein's monster coming to life. He could taste the shock of adrenaline in his mouth; he could hear a faint buzzing as the hum of the boat faded in and out around him. He wobbled on his feet and had to grab at the nearest bunk to keep from falling over.

He was trapped seven hundred feet underwater with someone who knew his true identity, who knew that he was hiding something, and who was looking for a secret.

Looking for *him*.

Some of the curtains on the other bunks were pulled closed — there had been men sleeping while this was happening. So whoever it was must have been incredibly quiet. George's curtain was pulled, so Fiske jerked it open. If there was anyone who would understand his terror, it would be George.

"George!" he hissed, giving George a fierce shake. George gave a great jerk and his eyes popped open, his arms and legs flying up and down and side to side. He tried to sit up straight and thumped his head hard on the bunk above him.

"What! What?" George yelled. He rubbed his eyes and looked at Fiske with a sleepy scowl. "What is it, Fiske?"

"Look," said Fiske, pointing at his bunk across the narrow gap. "You would have been here. It wasn't like this before. Have you been asleep the whole time? Did you see — did you hear? Anything?"

"What in the . . . ?" George rubbed his eyes and slithered out of his bunk to take a closer look at the damage. "Is that your stuff?"

"Yeah," said Fiske, rubbing a hand over his damp hair. He was spooked and shaking. "I was just in the head and I came back and it was like this. Did you hear anything? You were asleep, I know, but if you did, I just . . ."

"You know," said George. "I might have. I was reading for a bit before I fell asleep and — you know, I heard these footsteps. Heavy footfalls. Like there was a giant in

the room. I thought it was Ralph popping in, and I didn't want to hear any of his lectures, so I stayed quiet and kept the curtain shut. You don't — you don't think it was Ralph, do you?"

"Ralph?" said Fiske. Ralph, who always looked so annoyed with Fiske? If there was a . . . a *Vesper* on board, could it be Ralph?

The skin on Fiske's neck prickled as if the *Vesper* were there, watching him. Waiting for him. Biding his time until Fiske messed up, looked the wrong way, said the wrong thing — like they both knew he would. And then it would be over. The *Vesper* would pounce, would take the ring. Fiske would fail.

"Fiske?" said George, tilting his head. "Are you okay?"

"I shouldn't have w-oken you," said Fiske. "Sorry."

"Do you need help putting things back together?" asked George.

"No," said Fiske. "I can — I can do it. Don't, um, tell anyone, okay?"

"Sure," said George. "Your secret is safe with me."

No, thought Fiske. *It's not safe with anyone.*



That night, as Fiske was getting ready to sleep, Ralph walked into the bunk room. He had every right to be there, but that didn't mean that Fiske didn't jump up and clutch his toothbrush to his chest as if it were his favorite teddy bear.

"What?" asked Ralph, and Fiske could have sworn he was baring his teeth when he said it.

"Nothing," said Fiske.

"You know, you don't have to wear that suit all the time, every day. We do have pajamas down here. And showers."

"I'm fine," said Fiske.

"Actually, you smell," said Ralph. "Or shouldn't I talk that way to Admiral King's grandson?" He said it like a challenge, Fiske thought. He didn't believe that story at all.

"You can talk to me however you want," said Fiske. "I don't c-care one way or another." Ralph didn't say anything back to Fiske, but as he was leaving, he made sure to give Fiske a firm shove with his shoulder. Fiske stumbled backward into the bunks, his heart thudding wildly in his chest.

The next morning, though, Ralph was acting as if nothing had happened.

He and Fiske were in the torpedo room, as was expected of them.

“Whales,” Ralph was saying, “are fascinating creatures. Did you know that they know what sorts of things they’re swimming around just by clicking at them? Beautiful things.”

It was near the end of their shift. For six hours, Fiske had been walking on broken glass around Ralph. The only thing that kept him from going entirely crazy was the other sailors on torpedo duty.

“Do you, uh, do you know a lot about them?” asked Fiske. *What benefit would a Vesper have in knowing a lot about whales*, he wondered. Were whales much more vicious than Fiske thought?

“I grew up in Maine,” said Ralph. “Right on the coast. Dad keeps a lighthouse, so I spent a lot of time on the water as a kid.”

“And then you joined the Navy,” said Fiske, carefully edging his mouth around every word.

“Seemed a natural thing to do,” said Ralph. “I thought about doing sonar like your friend George there, but I’m not that kind of brain. I guess I’m more on the brawn end of things.”

“Come on, Kane,” called one of the other sailors. “We’re headed to the mess. Jack’s made up some of that pot roast and we don’t want to miss it.”

Fiske stood up and got ready to follow the other sailors. “Our shift isn’t over for another three minutes,” said Ralph, his gaze sweeping the other sailors and landing on Fiske like an anvil.

“But the pot roast,” said the sailor. “Think of the pot roast, Kane. That roast, and the potatoes and carrots and all of that stewing together all day.” He rubbed his stomach and made a ridiculous show of smacking his lips together.

Ralph didn’t say anything, but he did roll his eyes, which the other sailor seemed to think meant that he was free to take the others and head to the mess.

“Where do you think you’re going?” said Ralph as Fiske tried to follow them.

“I — I . . . uh, I, um, pot roast.”

“There’s three minutes left,” said Ralph. “We’re staying for those three minutes.”

So much could happen in three minutes! Fiske edged away from Ralph. The last of the sailors had skittered off, leaving Fiske by himself with Ralph. The torpedo silo seemed to grow taller, and wider, and deeper, and full of a thousand times more empty space. How far away was the mess? Fiske went over the route in his head. Would anyone hear him scream?

Fiske wanted to run, but he couldn't find the words to make an excuse, and his tongue felt cold and clumsy in his mouth.

On the torpedo control panel, a red light began to blink.

"Shoot," said Ralph, grumbling to himself.

"What?" asked Fiske. Vesper or not, they were still surrounded by missiles. Fiske wasn't sure which one he should be more scared of.

"There's something wrong with number four," said Ralph, looking up. The torpedoes were stacked three high; number four was near the top of the room. There was a narrow ladder that led up to a catwalk just as narrow the missiles.

"Wrong?" asked Fiske, his voice trembling perhaps just a little more than he wanted it to. "Wrong l-like . . . like how?"

"I don't know," said Ralph. "Easiest way to check would be to go up and take a look at it." He hooked his thumb at the ladder. "Up you go."

"Me!" Fiske cried. "I have to go up?"

"Well, that or you can stay down here and use your vast submarining experience to read these gauges and figure out when the system has stabilized. Sound good?"

"I'll climb up," said Fiske. He pretended like his hands weren't sweaty and slippery against the cold metal of the ladder. He also pretended that three rows of torpedoes weren't that big of a deal.

He tried to fight the vertigo as he climbed, and the sensation that every slight shift of his body weight was going to send him plunging back to the hard metal floor. His heart was jolting around in his chest, as if his panic had knocked it loose from its moorings. Three torpedoes high was actually quite high once you were up there.

At the top of the ladder, he would have to transition to the catwalk. There was a reason that only cats should do things like this, and Fiske suspected it was because they had the extra lives to spare, just in case.

He looked up. Just a bit more to go.

And then the lights went out.



There are no windows on a submarine; there is no chance for so much as a sliver of natural light. When there are no lights on, there is no gradient and no shadows; there is nothing but pitch-black, disorienting darkness.

Fiske froze, his hands glued around the ladder's handles. If he let go, he would fall. He knew it. Something in the darkness would shake him loose, like a leaf in late autumn.

"Fiske! Fiske, are you up there?" Ralph was shouting. "Stay where you are. Don't go banging around. Don't explode anything."

Right. Fiske swallowed. Good plan.

He heard some movement down below. Ralph must have been feeling his way around, searching for a switch, a lamp — something. Unless he was feeling his way toward Fiske in order to murder him in the dark.

Fiske couldn't move. He could only squeeze his eyes shut tight and hope that the lights came on soon.



The Vesper turned on his infrared goggles and locked the door.

The Cahill was clinging to the little metal ladder as if it were his mommy, probably terrified of both the dark and the prospect of being alone with Ralph. The Vesper rolled his eyes. As if the Vespers would try to recruit a mind as thick as Ralph's. If Ralph blathered on any more about his precious whales, the Vesper thought he might vomit right into a torpedo chute.

Ralph was edging toward the door, and the Vesper was easily able to avoid him. Ralph wasn't the target. He wasn't the Boy King they were after. Fiske's eyes were squeezed tight in the dark, and the Vesper watched as he tried to take one hand from the ladder. It took a few tries — as soon as he would loosen his grip, Fiske slapped his hand back against the rungs, reluctant to let go for even just a moment. But eventually, he managed, and made a grabbing motion at his chest. Fiske patted a spot just over his heart, and whatever was there made him visibly relax. Fiske was hiding something, and now the Vesper knew just where.

The Vesper slipped over to the ladder and began to climb.



Fiske was still frozen up there, scarcely able to breathe.

He closed his eyes. Then it felt more like he was blind by choice, rather than by panic-inducing circumstances. He tried to slow his breathing, slow his heavily

pounding heart. Did he want to climb down? Ralph was there, and how did he know that Ralph didn't plan it all this way?

"The door's locked," Ralph called up. His voice sounded far away — as far as one could be while in a cramped room on a submarine.

But there was another sound. A closer sound. The sound of the ladder, creaking just the slightest bit. But that didn't make any sense — Ralph was near the door, and Fiske hadn't moved a hair.

Someone else had to be in the room.

Someone else was on the ladder.

Someone was coming for Fiske.

"Ralph?" Fiske called. "Ralph, are you still down there?"

"Stop talking, I'm trying to figure this out," Ralph called back. Did he sound closer? Was he the one on the ladder? Fiske couldn't tell, and he couldn't see. He pressed one hand against his poop suit; the ring was still there.

"I hear someone coming," said Ralph. He began to pound on the door. "In here! It's locked or jammed or something! Someone come let us out!"

"Ralph, where are you?" Fiske yelled. The dark was so thick it left him in limbo. Nothing was where it seemed or as it seemed; nothing was safe and everything was a danger. Panic was creeping like spiders all over him. Ralph had cut the lights and locked them in; of course he had. Ralph had sent him up so high, so that when the lights went off, Fiske would what — panic? Yes, it had worked. He was going to fall, or accidentally hit something on one of the missiles, and then they would all blow up. He needed to get down, he needed to get out of the torpedo room!

He would climb down. He would hide where Ralph couldn't find him, wouldn't expect him.

"Stay where you are, Fiske, I'm looking for the flashlight," said Ralph. He was close by now; Fiske could tell.

And then, someone grabbed Fiske's ankle and pulled.

Fiske went down, a yelp of surprise tumbling out of him as he landed on top of another body. Fiske flailed and kicked and the person beneath him yelled and flailed and kicked back.

"Are you in there, Kane?" said someone on the other side of the door. "Is Fiske in there with you?"

“Lieutenant Oppowitz!” Fiske yelled. His cheek was throbbing from an elbow hitting under his eye. “I’m in here! Help!”

“Stop kicking! Stop moving!” Ralph yelled back at him. Hands knocked against Fiske, and he could feel someone pulling at his poopy suit. They were feeling for the ring. Whoever was in the dark could see, and they knew where the ring was. Fiske tried to roll away, but someone grabbed his legs and twisted him around.

“Get off of me! Leave it alone!” Fiske yelled. He gave a kick and scrambled away. The lights flickered on a moment later, and Lieutenant Oppowitz stood in the open door, a ring of keys dangling from his hand.

“What is going on in here?” asked the lieutenant. Fiske was scrambling away. He could feel his cheek beginning to swell. Ralph stood up and wiped his bleeding nose.

Fiske. Ralph. And the lieutenant. There was no one else in the room.

“He tried to attack me!” Fiske yelled.

“I did not! You jumped on me!” Ralph said.

“Now, let’s calm down,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. “Mr. King, I don’t believe that Petty Officer Kane would do a thing like that. I don’t believe that for a moment.”

“He pulled me off the ladder,” said Fiske.

“I didn’t,” said Ralph. “I didn’t touch him until he fell on me. And then it sure wasn’t intentional.”

“Are you saying, Petty Officer, that someone else was in the room?” Lieutenant Oppowitz asked.

Both Fiske and Ralph fell quiet. It wasn’t out of the question. It was one of the larger rooms on the submarine, with plenty of nooks and crannies in which to hide. Fiske looked around, as if expecting someone to pop up from behind a missile and to give them a little wave. But no one did.

“H-he attacked me,” Fiske said again. “He was the only one here. The others had gone to lunch and he made me stay behind so he could attack me.”

“That’s a lie!” Ralph roared, tensing. Fiske could tell it was taking every ounce of his military training to keep from lunging.

“Fiske,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz in a low voice. He took Fiske gently by the shoulder and turned him away from Ralph. “Think about what you’re saying. Do you really believe that Petty Officer Kane would keep you around to attack you in the dark? Why would he want to do that? I know he’s a little rough around the edges, but I picked him to help you because I trust him. Because he’s a good sailor, and that’s

the most important thing to him. Does that sound like a person who would attack you?”

Fiske glanced between Lieutenant Oppowitz and Ralph, who was so angry he was practically burning with it. Of course the lieutenant couldn't see it; he didn't know what Fiske knew.

“Excuse me,” said Fiske.

He left the torpedo room in a hurry, blowing past Ralph and Lieutenant Oppowitz without a glance back. There was no denying it now, no passing anything off as coincidence. Ralph had to be the Vesper.



George was coming out of the head when Fiske grabbed him by the sleeve and pulled him into the cold storage room.

“What? What?!” George cried.

“Quiet!” Fiske hissed at him. “I need your help. I need to trust someone and you’ve been voluntarily nice to me down here, you know? An-and so I need to ask for your help.”

“You do?” said George, his eyebrows lifting. “I mean, you do? What? What can I do?”

“I’m — I’m not who everyone thinks I am,” Fiske said. “I can’t really — I can’t really talk about it. But there’s someone here who knows who I am an-and I think — I know — he wants to kill me. I think, m-maybe, you can guess who?”

“What do you need?” asked George. “Do you need me to send a message to someone? Hide something for you? What can I do?”

“I need — ” Fiske started. But then Ralph came around the corner.

It was like slow motion, the way he walked down the submarine’s hallway, his iron eyes boring into Fiske and grinding him down into sand. And then, in moments, he was gone again. But Fiske felt like that one encounter had taken years off of his life.

George’s eyes flicked back and forth between Fiske and the door that Ralph had gone through, as if any minute he expected armed guards to come bursting in.

“I can’t talk now,” said Fiske. “But later. We’ll talk later. I have to go.” He had to get away from everything. He had to go somewhere safe. But he didn’t think that space existed on this boat.

“Sure,” said George. “I’ll keep an eye out.”

Fiske nodded and then slipped away. George watched him go and exhaled. And then he smiled.



Fiske took his lunch with the officers that day. Lieutenant Oppowitz, who was too congenial to let the tiff from earlier keep him in a poor mood for long, was more than happy to have Fiske around, as it meant someone else to show off his pictures to.

“That there is Lucy,” he was saying, pointing at a very fat baby with very fat blond curls. “She’s just barely two now, and quite the little spitfire. And that, that’s Peter.” Peter was the opposite of Lucy, being stick-skinny with a shock of unruly hair. “He’s six. I don’t get to see them much, you know. But they send down familygrams whenever they can. My wife, Beth, she writes them, I mean. But the kids send messages. Lucy’s started talking. You know what Beth says she said the other day? She said ‘Dada.’ She did! I’m not even there and she’s got me on the brain. What a good little girl, am I right? What a daddy’s girl.”

“Come on, Herman. The kid doesn’t want to hear about your family back in Saint Louis,” said one of the officers. He passed the gravy boat. “Tell him about the time you blew something up.”

“I don’t mind,” said Fiske, taking the picture for a closer look. “It must be hard to be away from them for so long.” Fiske could sympathize with that. His only family that mattered was never around very often. Fiske thought Grace must be like a shark — if she stopped moving, she would die.

Before, he’d said it as a joke. But now, it was all too great a possibility. Something shook inside of him and he was seized with the need to talk to her. Just for a moment. Just to check and see if she was okay, to hear her voice say that she was fine. He knew that she wanted him to be safe, but it suddenly wasn’t fair that being on the submarine meant being completely cut off from her. He handed the picture back to the lieutenant.

“Ah, you know it is,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. He took his picture back and tucked it into the pocket of his pooppy suit. “But it’s a good job I have. And Beth, I think she likes the quiet. I’m a bit of a chatterbox myself — must be where Lucy gets it, you know.”

The chief medical officer, Lieutenant Robinson, came in then. He looked grim. "Oppowitz, might I steal your boy Mr. King there?"

"What's wrong?" asked Fiske.

"One of the men," said Lieutenant Robinson, "has been attacked. He's asking to see you. Said you might know something about it?"

"Attacked?" said Lieutenant Oppowitz. He looked at Fiske. "And you're involved again?"

"What? I — who? Who is asking for me?"

"Seaman Carmel. George Carmel."

Fiske went pale. Ralph had seen them talking.

"I'll come right away," said Fiske, setting his napkin aside and standing up.

"I'm coming, too," said Lieutenant Oppowitz, his face grim.

They followed Lieutenant Robinson out to the medical berths. Fiske could feel Lieutenant Oppowitz's confusion and anger as he walked. It seeped out of him like water through a sieve.

"Is it bad?" asked Fiske.

"A concussion, I think. Someone hit him on the back of the head. Out of the blue, he says. Petty Officer Kane found him in the hallway outside the control room." Lieutenant Robinson shook his head.

"Does he know who hit him?" asked Lieutenant Oppowitz.

"Says he might," said Robinson. "But wanted to talk to the boy here first."

Lieutenant Robinson opened the door to the infirmary. It smelled of rubbing alcohol and antiseptics, like bleach and the chalk of pills. George was lying on one of the beds.

"Seaman Carmel," said Lieutenant Oppowitz. "What happened? You need only say the word and we'll take care of this right away."

"I don't know for sure, it happened so fast. But I'm pretty sure . . . I think I know who it was." He paused. "Petty Officer Kane." The two lieutenants were visibly stunned by this, but Fiske couldn't imagine why. It was obvious that Ralph would do something like this!

"Kane?" said Lieutenant Robinson. "You're certain?"

"Very nearly," said George. "Fiske can tell you — he's been after me since we set foot on the boat. I don't know why. I think because I'm doing better on my quals. It's not an excuse, of course, but Fiske can tell you."

“Mr. King?” said Lieutenant Robinson. Fiske opened his mouth to agree, but Lieutenant Oppowitz held up a hand.

“Now, wait,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. “I’m the kind of man who relies on the facts in front of him, make no mistake about it. And now I’ve got two men who say that Petty Officer Kane attacked them within an hour of each other. Now, I know Petty Officer Kane. I’ve known him since he enrolled in sub school. And the Ralph I know wouldn’t do anything like that.”

Of course not! Fiske wanted to yell. *The Ralph that you know isn’t a Vesper! The Ralph you know is working extra hard to look like a sailor so he doesn’t get found out!*

“I’m going to ask you to think about your story again, Seaman,” said the lieutenant, folding his arms. “Petty Officer Kane is the one who found you in the hall. Are you sure you’re not just getting confused?”

“No,” said George, his face furrowing in frustration. “It was him! I’m not lying. I wouldn’t do that. I’ve got no reason to do that.”

The two lieutenants looked at each other.

“I’m telling you, I know Ralph Kane and he wouldn’t do that!” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. Lieutenant Robinson sighed. “Don’t you sit there and act like you don’t know Ralph, either, Jim. He’s a good sailor and a better man. Don’t you act like he’s not.”

“I’m just looking at the evidence, Herman,” said Lieutenant Robinson.

Fiske wanted to grab Lieutenant Oppowitz by the shoulders and shake him. How could he not see? How could he be so blind to who Ralph really was?

“Your evidence is bunk,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz. “Listening to a puke and a kid when you know Ralph just as well as I do. This is a man’s life and his job we’re talking about!”

“We’ll bring Kane to the XO’s office and talk to him,” said Lieutenant Robinson, trying to inject some rationality back into the conversation. “There’s got to be some explanation for this.”

“You,” said Lieutenant Oppowitz, pointing a finger at Fiske. “You’re sticking with me from now on. You’re not going to be wandering around on your own. And you’re not going to be getting into any more trouble. And whoever is going around attacking my sailors isn’t going to get a hand on you, is that clear?”

Fiske could feel himself shrink — he could feel all of his bravery and will coil up on itself deep down in his belly. But he nodded. There was nothing else he could do.

“Well then,” said Lieutenant Robinson. He went to the desk and picked up the intercom phone and buzzed the officers’ mess. “Robinson here. We have a situation. Yes, Seaman Carmel. Send Third Petty Officer Kane to the XO’s office. I’ll be right over.” And then he hung up. “You coming, Herman?”

Fiske could see the conflict in Lieutenant Oppowitz’s face. Yes, he very much wanted to go, Fiske could tell. But he wasn’t about to leave Fiske alone. And he certainly wasn’t going to take Fiske into the room with Ralph.

“All right, you’re sticking with me *after* this. You go back to your bunk and you don’t move a muscle until I’m done with this, you understand me? And from then on, you don’t leave my side unless you’re in the head or asleep, you got that? We’ve got twelve hours left on this boat and so help me . . . you understand me?”

“I do,” said Fiske.



Fiske stayed with Lieutenant Oppowitz for the rest of the day, until it was time for bed. And the only reason they parted then was that there were no free bunks in the officers’ quarters.

By the next morning, the news about Ralph and George had spread through the ranks. It was on everyone’s mind at breakfast. Fiske had waited for Lieutenant Oppowitz to meet him in the officers’ mess, but when he didn’t, Fiske went to the crew’s tables on his own.

“Well, if it was going to be anyone,” said one of the other seamen, a mechanic named Dale, “you knew it was going to be Ralph. You have to wonder how he even got onto the submarine in the first place. If you hadn’t noticed, he wasn’t the sharpest tool in the shed.”

Fiske poked at his eggs.

“I heard he had to go to sub school twice,” said another mechanic. “First time he failed out. He had to beg to be allowed to get back in.”

“You think you’ll go join the Navy, go to sub school after this adventure?” Dale asked Fiske.

Fiske shrugged. He wouldn’t really have to, obviously. If he wanted to, he could just ask the secretary of the Navy to let him stay around.

“Going to sub school twice,” said the other mechanic with a laugh. “He had to really want it, I guess.”

Something pricked in the back of Fiske’s brain — something that wasn’t right about this whole situation. But he couldn’t put his finger directly on what it was.

“Where is he now?” asked Fiske, poking at a pile of scrambled eggs. The other sailors were quiet, so Fiske glanced up. “I mean, is he — is he in trouble, or . . .”

“Yeah,” said Dale. “They made him step off the boat. Play nice or play with the fishes.” The other sailors laughed.

“They — they wouldn’t really do that?” Fiske asked, glancing around. He knew the answer when the sailors laughed even louder.

“I don’t know, he’s probably been moved somewhere,” said Dale, shoveling a pile of egg and bacon into his mouth. “Might have moved him into the torpedo room. Some of the taller guys would bunk in there if they couldn’t fit in their toaster slots of beds.”

So he wasn’t in custody or a brig or anything like that. Fiske frowned and pushed back his plate — he hadn’t eaten anything at all — and excused himself.

The conversation at breakfast had left him feeling exposed for some reason — like he was standing in the middle of a field with no chance of seeing what might come for him out of the trees. He went to find Lieutenant Oppowitz.

He pressed his hand against his chest. Yes, the ring was still there. Funny — it didn’t seem like something that would be very important. It wasn’t covered in diamonds or precious stones; rings like his were generally only worth their sentimental value. And yet, it was the most important thing in the world.

He would go find Lieutenant Oppowitz, and his last few hours on the submarine would be quick and safe.

That thought snagged him. He ducked into the control room and checked the clocks and the maps. He wasn’t an expert at reading them, of course, but even Fiske could tell that they were nearly there.

They were almost to Puerto Rico. He was almost off of the submarine. He’d done it. Well, almost. But he was almost there!

“Quite a trip, isn’t it?” said Lieutenant Robinson.

“Oh, um, yes,” said Fiske. “Aren’t — I mean, should you be in the sick bay?”

“No patients,” said Robinson. “My only one checked out this morning. Your friend was fine — nothing too serious at all. It looked worse than it really was. I can’t believe

we'll be making it to Puerto Rico all underwater. The whole way, Mr. King. We're breaking records."

"Yeah," said Fiske. "Say, have you seen Lieutenant Oppowitz? He wanted me to stick by him and — and I haven't seen him."

"Not since last night," said Robinson. "Have you tried the officers' bunks? He likes to steal a few minutes when he can to write to Beth and the kids."

"Thank you," said Fiske.

From the control room, he went down to the officers' bunks and knocked on the door.

"Lieutenant Oppowitz?" he called. "I heard you were still in here, sir. Sir? It's Fiske King, sir. I have something to tell you."

But there was no answer.

Fiske knocked again, and when Lieutenant Oppowitz still didn't open the door, Fiske tried the handle himself. It opened easily and he stepped inside.

The room smelled strange. Like smoke; like burnt hair. Fiske stepped inside very carefully. The bunks in the officers' room weren't stacked as high; there was more room to move and to breathe. Lieutenant Oppowitz was lying on the second bunk, high in the last row.

He was dead.

Fiske recoiled. The lieutenant was staring with half-open eyes. His skin looked gray and cold and as if it hadn't been used in a long time. There were two burnt patches on the front of his poop suit, directly over his heart, where the fabric of the suit and of the lieutenant's undershirt had been burned clear away. His left hand was thrown forward, and the skin around his wedding ring was burned. He'd been electrocuted.

Fiske scrambled toward the door, wanting to scream, wanting to call for help, but unable to do anything except gasp and heave and then throw up in the middle of the hallway.

He was cold with sweat; it ran down his neck and under the collar of his poop suit. He still felt nauseous. Someone had killed Lieutenant Oppowitz.

Lieutenant Oppowitz was dead.

Lieutenant Oppowitz, who had his wife and Peter and Lucy at home. Lieutenant Oppowitz who had been so nice, and who had just wanted to do an honorable thing and do right by his family, and that's why he was on a submarine. That's why he was taking care of Fiske this whole time.

And he was dead.

Lieutenant Oppowitz wasn't supposed to be the one to die. Fiske was the Cahill; Fiske was the one who was supposed to live with a constant threat of doom. He didn't like it, but he almost expected it now. Lieutenant Oppowitz hadn't been expecting it. He wasn't even on a mission of war right now; he was out with a boat to sail all of the kinks out of it.

"Fiske?"

Fiske had stumbled back toward the control room. There were sailors going about their business, and Commander Wilkinson was there in the center of the room. They were all looking at him. And Fiske opened his mouth. But nothing came out.

"You look terrible," said Commander Wilkinson, coming over to peer at Fiske. "Are you seasick? After all this time? Ranker, go get Lieutenant Robinson."

No! Fiske wanted to yell. *Stop!* He wanted to scream at them all that Lieutenant Oppowitz was dead and that someone had killed him but all of the words got caught behind his teeth and he couldn't make them come out. His face grew hotter and redder and his blood was at a rolling boil as it bubbled through him.

"The l-lieutenant is . . ." began Fiske. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't breathe. He grabbed for his chest, grasping the ring through the fabric of his suit.

"Fiske, spit it out," said George. He'd appeared in the doorway behind Fiske.

"Lieutenant Oppowitz is dead."

The words spilled out of him, hurtling across the control room and smacking each of the men in the face.

"What?" said the commander. "What do you mean — how did he — Robinson! Where is he, Fiske? What do you mean dead?"

"The officers' bunks," said Fiske.

"Someone get Lieutenant Robinson over there right now!" Wilkinson roared. "Someone get the medics!"

"It's too late for that," said Fiske. "He's dead. I saw him. Someone killed him."

Those three words cast a hush over the room. Commander Wilkinson seemed to turn to stone.

"An-and I know who did it," said Fiske. He glanced at George, who turned pale. "Ralph Kane did it."

"Commander, do we — "

“No. Full speed ahead,” said the commander, wiping his hand over his wrinkled forehead. “We don’t slow down for anything. Washington is expecting us to make a good showing, and we’re going to give them that.” He turned back to Fiske. “Ralph Kane wouldn’t kill Lieutenant Oppowitz. That doesn’t make sense at all. Herman was Kane’s sea dad. He got him onto the boat. Ralph wouldn’t kill the lieutenant. Robinson is going to check on him. He’s a doctor, he’ll get to the bottom of things.”

Everyone keeps saying that, Fiske thought, but why can’t they understand what’s so obvious? Lieutenant Oppowitz is dead!

And he knew who had done it.

Fiske buzzed with anger; he could hear it in his ears and feel it in his skin and it made him shake and it made him burn and freeze at the same time. It wasn’t fair. And Fiske was going to do something about it.



Fiske jerked open the door to the torpedo room.

Ralph was there, clipboard in hand, checking his pressure gauges. Fiske took a deep breath, and then yelled at the back of his head.

“I don’t know how you did it,” Fiske yelled at him. “But I’m here now. And it’s just me. So if you’re after anything from me you’d better take it now because I’m not letting anyone else die, all right? I’m not going to do that.”

Ralph just stared at him. “What are you talking about?” he asked.

“I know what you did! I just found him. You killed Lieutenant Oppowitz! I know what you’re here to do!”

“Lieutenant Oppowitz is dead?” Ralph asked. He turned around and dropped the clipboard. “How — I — what?” Ralph came toward Fiske, but Fiske did his best to hold his ground, even though his heart was pounding so hard that it was like drums in his head and his whole skull ached for it. Still, he took a step or two back. “What are you . . . he’s dead? How did he die? We’re not at war. I mean — was it the Russians? How did . . . what are you talking about?”

Fiske felt his resolve begin to fade. Suddenly, there was that feeling creeping up — like he’d forgotten to put on pants in the morning. Like there was chocolate on his face. Like Ralph had absolutely no idea of what Fiske was talking about.

“You — you’re not — ?” Fiske stammered. “I mean, you’re not a Vesper?”

“A what?” said Ralph. “Lieutenant Oppowitz is dead?”

Of course Ralph wasn't a Vesper. He'd taken his test twice to get onto the submarine. A Cahill would pull strings to get into a place like this. A Vesper . . . a Vesper would be the best of the best. He'd have been recruited. And nothing against Ralph, but big and brawny were a dime a dozen. No, there was only one member of the crew who was light-years ahead of everyone else.

Only one other who could have gone to MIT, or Harvard, but instead had chosen meager pay and cramped quarters.

"A Vesper."

Fiske spun around.

George.

George stood there. He held something in his hand that looked half like a gun and half like a cattle prod. "A Vesper, that's right. Ralph only wishes he could aspire to these ranks, Fiske. Maybe one day, whale boy. Maybe once you've learned to add past ten while keeping your shoes on."

"Run, Ralph!" Fiske shouted. He took off running as soon as his feet were able to catch up with his brain. Standing around trading barbs with an armed Vesper wasn't a wise thing to do, and Fiske wasn't going to have any of it. He didn't have time to think about where he would go. All he knew was that he couldn't stay here.



Before Fiske had learned that there was a Vesper on board who was willing to kill and before he had to run for his life to escape that Vesper, the *Nautilus* had been an amazing thing. A feat of engineering and art that combined to make something entirely remarkable, practically superhuman.

Now, with his life moments from being over, Fiske didn't see the *Nautilus* as something breathtaking — it was more like an aquatic death trap.

The boat that he had been getting to know was suddenly full of shadows and steam, rattling noises and the grinding of gears. Fiske ran over the metal walkways and climbed ladders and did everything he could to get lost in the maze of metal and piping. Maybe if he couldn't find his way out, then George couldn't find his way to him.

He wished there was time to think back over everything that had happened on the *Nautilus*. He wished that he could tick over every sign that he should have seen coming, every mistake he had made. He wished he could remember if he had given

anything away to George about the Clues, about the ring, about Grace. But the only thing he could do was run for his life. There would be time to feel stupid later.

Or there would be time to be dead later.

He could hear George coming — the creaks of the walkways, the sound of heavy breathing — and if he could hear George, then George could hear him. Fiske stopped running. Slowly and quietly, Fiske slipped behind one of the larger steam pipes. He crouched down, keeping in the shadow.

George turned toward where Fiske hid. Fiske could see his shoes on the path. He glanced around. There was nothing to throw at George, nothing to hit him with, if it came to that. There was just Fiske.

“Come on out, Mr. Cahill,” said George. He was edging his way down the hall, his head swiveling this way and that as he tried to figure out where Fiske might be hiding. “It’s all well and good to put up a fight, but there’s wisdom in knowing when to give up. You know what’s going to happen now. You’re going to come out, you’re going to tell me your secrets, and then — well, I’m sure you can guess. Come on.”

Fiske crouched all the deeper. There was a small gap — about a foot and a half — between the walkway and the floor. A mess of small pipes and wires ran under it, but Fiske was fairly certain he could squeeze in there if need be. He shifted his weight toward it.

“Come out!” George yelled. “You think I’m going to let you ruin this for me? Do you know what they did for me, Fiske? Your old family friends? You know what they did? They sought me out. That’s right. They wanted me. Little Georgie Carmel from Massillon, Ohio. George Carmel who couldn’t catch a football or run a mile to save his life but who is a genius.

“And just think of how proud they’ll be when they find out how I handled *you*. I was just supposed to tinker with the computer systems, and then, *you* were sent on board the ship. I’d have known you immediately, even if we didn’t know you’d be down here.” George paused. “You’ll make me a legend in their ranks, Fiske. Don’t think I don’t know you’re hiding something, and I’m going to find it. We both know I’m better than you. We both know I’ll win.”

Fiske bristled, but he stayed put. George was right in front of him now, holding the half gun. Little blue sparks were flashing from the two short wires at the end of the barrel. It looked like a bad way to die.

The lonesomeness of his situation folded around Fiske like a dark quilt. George was going to kill him, and no one would know what had happened. He would vanish in the worst way imaginable — without having said good-bye to anyone. He should have fled to a place where there would be more people — he saw that now, he was so stupid. He should have gone to the control room, where he wouldn't be alone.

But maybe he could still get there. Maybe he didn't have to die in the dark.

Fiske brought his sleeve to his mouth and bit into the thread holding his cuff button in place. His heart was pounding all through his body; it was as if it had turned on an internal PA system and was broadcasting his fear from his brain to his toes. One false move, one noise, and it would be over.

It took a bit of chewing, but soon he'd bitten away the thread. Taking the button from his mouth and holding it between two shaking fingers, he flicked it, like a paper football.

The button flew behind George and over the walkway where he stood, rattling against the pipes. George spun around and stuck his shock gun into the dark. There was a flash of light, and that was the moment that Fiske needed. He slipped down the way, hauled himself up onto the walkway, and began to run.

George spun around and chased after him, the weapon raised. Fiske ran with flashes of light on either side of him as George shot bolt after bolt, shock after shock. The electricity sizzled against the metal, against the pipes and wires all around.

One of the bolts must have knocked into a seam in one of the pipes. It fried the metal, and the pressure from inside was too great. A spurt of water sprang forth, and then another, and then two more. Water sprayed in all directions, soaking Fiske and making the walkways slick and dangerous.

The nuclear reactor hummed ahead. Fiske kept running, even though his lungs were screaming and clawing at him to stop, even though his legs felt as if the muscles in them would tear at any moment.

George fired again. The electric bolt flew just past Fiske's shoulder and crackled over the reactor's control panel. Sparks flew like fireworks, and smoke flared up. The water mixed with the electricity, and the entire reactor began to sizzle and crack. The lights flickered off immediately and an alarm began to wail, softly at first, as if it were just waking up from a long sleep, and then with a ferocity that was almost more frightening than the reactor itself. All of the lights on the reactor's panel turned red

and they flickered like the world's most terrifying display of Christmas lights. It was enough to freeze even George for a moment — he seemed unable to move.

The hum of the reactor turned into a groan and a rumble. The boat began to shake. Fiske edged away from it. He wanted to run, but he was afraid to take his eyes off of the reactor, afraid that the moment he looked away, the whole thing would melt.

But he had to go. *Control room, control room* — he repeated it over and over in his head and in his legs. He left the howling reactor and a stricken-looking George and ran.

The control room was grim when he arrived in a burst of breath and panic. Commander Wilkinson frowned at him, and then turned back to barking at his sailors with the radio to his mouth. The siren wailed here as well, and the commander was doing his best to be louder than it.

“All hands — all hands to emergency stations. Repeat: all hands to emergency stations,” he yelled, waving his arm at the men in the control room. “Fire up the backup diesel engines; Ranker, you keep this mess of a boat going and don't you stop for anything. We're nearly there. We are nearly there!”

The sailors scattered — most of them headed straight out of the control room and down to the reactor or the diesel engines. Then the commander turned to Fiske.

“Nothing to worry about, Mr. King,” he said, putting a hand on Fiske's shoulder and trying to steer him toward the door. “You just sit tight and — and we'll get this sorted out. I'm going to check on the repairs. You head on back to your bunk or the mess and you just sit tight.” But Fiske didn't believe him, and he didn't think the commander believed himself.

“Ranker,” the commander said, “you're in charge until I get back.” And then he left for the reactor.

Fiske watched him go, his mouth hanging open but no words coming out. He couldn't leave! There was so much to tell him — about George and Lieutenant Oppowitz, about Ralph, about Fiske's life hanging in the balance. Whether it was a lack of breath or a lack of courage, Fiske couldn't say. The words stuck to the insides of his mouth and beneath his tongue. More than anything, Fiske wanted to curl in upon himself. He balled his hands into furious fists and curled his bottom lip in between his teeth.

There were only a few men left in the room, but even among them, panic was spreading like a germ.

Fiske felt it, too. Everything had spiraled out of control so quickly that he couldn't even place the moment that things had first started to go wrong. He felt unmoored and adrift in the ocean, with nothing to keep him from washing off the face of the earth.

And now there was no one to ask for help, no one to save him. He'd run to this place for protection, but he felt more alone and more exposed. And if George came — what would happen to the crew? What had happened to Ralph? Fiske's blood was pulsing in rhythm with the siren. The possibility that he might really die, that this crew of men might die because of him, slammed into him and knocked his breath away.

Ralph burst in. "There you are!" he said. "What in the — what is — where's George?"

"I — I — " said Fiske, shrugging his shoulders and trying not to shake like a brittle leaf.

The siren stopped for a moment, and a voice crackled over the intercom in the silence. "Reactor critical. All hands to remain at emergency stations."

"You should be — " Fiske began, but Ralph cut him off. He glanced at the other sailors and then grabbed Fiske's arm, pulling him out into the hallway.

"I saw George, just the same as you did, and I heard him, too. Lieutenant Oppowitz would have made sure you were safe. And that's what I'm going to do," said Ralph. "Besides, I've known George was no good since he accused me of hitting him. Believe me, any other place but here I would have, but I take this job seriously, and I'm not about to let some puke take it away from me."

Fiske could almost breathe easy because of that. He didn't want to be in the way, but he wouldn't deny that he felt much better with Ralph on his side. Still, guilt slung itself around his neck like a leaden scarf. Lieutenant Oppowitz *would* have done as much as he could to help Fiske.

Now, though, Fiske didn't know what help would look like. The boat might blow up and George was after him, and how was he supposed to make it out of either of those scenarios alive? He felt stupid. None of this would have happened if he hadn't been on the boat to begin with.

"What can w-we do?" asked Fiske, glancing around the deserted hallway.

"Hope," said Ralph.

The submarine gave a great shudder, which had both Fiske and Ralph grabbing for something to hold on to, to keep from falling over. The smell of oil and dirt hit them next, creeping through the air like mist rolling in.

“What’s that, what’s happening?” Fiske asked, wild eyed.

“They turned on the diesel engines,” said Ralph.

“Is that a good thing?” asked Fiske.

“I guess we’ll find out,” said Ralph. Fiske pressed his hand against the ring. “You keep doing that,” said Ralph, nodding toward Fiske’s hand.

Fiske scrambled to think of something to say, but he was saved by the crackle of the intercom.

“Reactor stable. Repeat: reactor stable. Relax, boys. We’ll make it out of this one yet.” The faint sound of cheering echoed down the empty halls, and Fiske felt his body relax for a moment. Jelly rippled through his muscles, and warmth swept over him. But it was only for a moment. Because even if he wasn’t going to blow up in a nuclear explosion, he still had a raging Vesper to handle.

A Vesper who would stop at nothing to kill him. A Vesper he couldn’t get away from.

“Ralph,” said Fiske. “I — I need to get off the boat.”

“What?” said Ralph. “You — that’s not how submarines work, Fiske.”

“No, but I have to,” said Fiske. “Everyone is going to stay at their emergency stations for a while, right?”

“Yeah, but — ”

“Then George will find me. And he’ll try to kill me. And I can’t let that happen, Ralph. I *can’t* let that happen. Not for me. It’s not — it’s not for me. Help me get off the boat. Please?”

Ralph looked at him, his face a mud puddle of confusion and concern and sadness. “Why are you down here, really?”

“To hide,” said Fiske. “A lot of good I am at that, I guess.”

The boys looked at each other for a moment, as Fiske silently begged the sailor to help him escape.

“Come on,” said Ralph, grabbing Fiske’s arm and leading him through the hallways to the ladder that Fiske had first used to board the submarine. “Climb quickly.”

Fiske scrambled up the ladder, driven by adrenaline and fear.

“You might die doing this, too, you know,” said Ralph, unscrewing the airtight door to the escape trunk.

“If I die in the water, what I have will die with me. If I die here, and George gets it . . .” Fiske didn’t want to shake and shiver in front of Ralph. But he was, and he couldn’t help it.

Ralph grabbed a great rubber vest down from a hook. It looked like what the astronauts in B movies wore while exploring Mars or the moon. “Put this on. This is a Momsen lung. Listen to me — are you listening to me?”

Fiske nodded while pulling the vest around his body and buckling it.

“This goes in your mouth,” Ralph said, handing him a mouthpiece connected to two rubber tubes that ran around to the vest. “Do not hold your breath. You’re going to want to hold your breath. You’re out in the middle of the ocean, you’re deep underwater, every single part of you is going to be screaming for you to hold your breath. Hold your breath, and you die. You listening to me? Hold your breath and you die. There’s so much pressure down here that the air in your lungs is under pressure, too. As you go up, it’s going to expand, and if you hold your breath, your lungs will explode.”

Fiske went pale.

“You’ve got to breathe normally,” said Ralph, tightening straps and hooking buckles. “In through this tube, and out through the other. Breathe normal. Don’t explode. You got it?”

Fiske nodded. Breathe normally. Don’t explode.

“See that green button right there?” Ralph said. “There’s another one on the outside of the door, too. Hit that green button once the hatch is closed and you’re ready to go. If you chicken out and don’t push it, then I will. You understand? Get ready,” said Ralph. He looked at Fiske. “You might be the bravest kid I ever met. Or the stupidest.”

“Probably both,” said Fiske. Ralph grinned at him, just for a moment.

“Stupidest,” said George. He was standing in the door, sopping wet with submarine water rolling down his temples. His shock gun sparked at his side, half-broken from the water but all the more dangerous for it. “Absolutely the stupidest.” He lifted the gun and pointed it.

At Ralph.

“Give me what you’re hiding,” said George.

“I don’t have anything,” said Ralph. But George shook his head.

“Not you. Cahill. Give it to me, Cahill. Wouldn’t this be just what you hate? Didn’t it just wreck you when Lieutenant Oppowitz died? Wouldn’t you hate for it to happen again, right in front of you?”

Fiske would. And George knew it, which just meant that Fiske was about as transparent as glass.

“Don’t get him involved,” said Fiske. “He doesn’t have anything.”

“Shut up, Fiske,” said Ralph, his eyes darting between Fiske, George, and the sparking end of the gun. “It’s no use pretending anymore.”

“What are you talking about?” said George, turning to Fiske in confusion. “What is he talking about?”

Fiske had no idea.

“We’re on the same side,” said Ralph. “I’m with you, George. I’m a — a Vesper.”

Fiske was stunned into frozen silence. How was that possible? How could he be so impossibly stupid as to trust a Vesper? Again?

“You’re what?” said George. “You’re on my side? Why? Why are you here? Who sent you? Didn’t they think I could do it on my own?”

“That doesn’t matter,” said Ralph. “I caught him. Isn’t that what counts?”

“Shut up,” snapped George, his eyes darting back and forth between the hooded Fiske and Ralph.

Fiske’s mind was spinning rapidly out of control as he tried to wrap it around what was happening in front of him. How could he be so stupid? How could he have disappointed Grace this much?

“I caught him first. He’s mine,” said Ralph, again.

“He’s not!” said George. “I’ve been stalking him this whole time! I killed that officer to get to him! You’re not going to take my hard work right out from under my nose.” He cocked the gun at Ralph.

“You’re really going to shoot your comrade?” said Ralph. “I don’t think they’d look very kindly on that. Do you?”

George faltered. “You were going to help him escape.”

That was true, thought Fiske. He glanced at Ralph. Ralph was looking at him with steady eyes, an unflinching face.

Fiske wanted to give up. He couldn’t begin to put into words how much he wanted to give up. Part of him wanted to just give them the ring — one of them, both of them, it didn’t matter.

But the other part knew that there was more to the story. Knew that there was something going on here. That if he could only trust himself, he would figure it out.

“I lied,” said Ralph to George. “I was just about to figure out what he was hiding when you showed up. Then I could take it and flush him.”

“Well,” said George, a self-satisfied smile creeping over his face. “I don’t know what it is, but I know where. Take off that vest, Cahill.”

Fiske didn’t move. He couldn’t if he had wanted to, and he definitely didn’t want to.

“I know it’s in the front of your suit, whatever you have!” George yelled, waving his sparking gun. Fiske shook his head the slightest bit. But George didn’t believe that. He marched up to Fiske and grabbed the Momsen lung with one hand, the other pointing the weapon straight at Fiske’s face. “I should just fry you and take it for myself.”

In that moment of distraction, Ralph darted to the door.

“Breathe!” Ralph yelled, slamming the hatch door shut.

There was a moment of soft quiet.

George had whipped around when Ralph slammed the hatch shut. Fiske’s gaze went to the green button, and when George turned back around, his eyes followed there.

“What — ”

Fiske looked back at George and then upward at the hatch. He knew what was coming. He knew what Ralph would do.

If Fiske had been scared before, it didn’t compare at all to this moment — this moment before the ship opened, and Fiske and George were swept out into the ocean.



Fiske was breathing. His eyes were squeezed shut tight but he breathed in and out, slowly rising to the surface. It was terrifying and surreal. The *Nautilus* sped off and upward, too, rising to the surface as well.

Fiske broke the water with a *pop*, bobbing like a rubber duck. He tore the mouthpiece away and he couldn’t help it — he screamed. He screamed in fear and in relief, in sadness and in uncut joy. He’d made it. He’d escaped the submarine. He wasn’t dead. He still had the ring. Puerto Rico was in sight. He was above the water.

George was not.



The swim to shore was exhausting, but Fiske was so glad to be off the boat that he didn't care at all. His mind spun with questions, but the physical need to lift one arm and then another, to kick through the ocean, kept his thoughts from wandering too far from the task at hand.

It was a long swim. But so long as there weren't any sharks around, he'd be fine.

Before he was too tired to go on, he felt the sand beneath his soggily sneakered feet and he pulled himself up onto a beach.

His shoes were full of sand and water; his pooppy suit not only smelled of salt and fish and seaweed, but it stuck to him like a second skin. Fiske unbuckled the Momsen lung and cast it aside on the sand. He desperately wished that he had some of that clean underwear that he had left in his cubby on the submarine.

He fell face-first onto the beach, utterly exhausted. There was sand in his mouth, his ears, and every other part of him, but he didn't care. He was never leaving land again, not for anything in the world. Fiske rolled over onto his back and spread out his arms and legs, basking in the sun. Alive. He was alive. Mission accomplished.

His hand flew to his chest again, pressing frantically into the fabric of the suit. And there it was.

He'd hidden away on a submarine. He'd kept the ring safe.

His mission was, to all intents and purposes, a success.

But it didn't feel that way. He stared up at the bluest sky he'd ever seen and he thought about Lieutenant Oppowitz, and Beth and Peter and Lucy in Saint Louis. He thought about the lieutenant's jokes and his sense of duty and pride.

And Fiske realized he was a miserable failure.



Grace had arranged everything, and soon Fiske found himself on a plane headed for Attleboro.

She was waiting for him on the tarmac, and Fiske ran to her as soon as he was on the ground. She wrapped her arms around him in the best big-sisterly way possible; there would be no more danger, no more death for at least the next ten seconds, and that was all Fiske wanted in the world.

"I'm so sorry," she said, taking his face in her hands and giving him a good looking over. "Fiske, I'm so sorry. I can't tell you how sorry I am. I didn't know — I just wasn't thinking straight, and I'm so sorry."

"I'm okay," said Fiske. "I'm really okay. I promise." Still, it was nice to be fussed over. "But how do you know that they won't be waiting for us at home? Or the next place you go?"

Grace cleared her throat. "I took care of it."

"What do you mean you — what happened to your car?" he asked. It had been black before; now it was a blue convertible.

"I had to drive the old one off a cliff," said Grace. "But I like this one better anyway."

"You had to drive it . . . you *had* to drive it off a . . . Grace!"

"I told you I took care of it."

"*Grace!*"

"I'm fine," she said. "You're fine. Everyone's fine."

Except they weren't. Not everyone.



He and Grace went back home for a few days; after the *Nautilus*, school would seem like a breeze. Still, Fiske needed a few days of simple quiet before he would be able to do anything at all, whether that was a Cahill mission or a geometry exam.

He'd scoured the papers for news of the *Nautilus* crew — of the reactor's breakdown, the death of Lieutenant Oppowitz. But the only thing he could find was an article praising the crew for their unprecedented, record-shattering trip from Connecticut to Puerto Rico.

Still, just because it was in the papers as having happened one way didn't mean that was the whole truth. Guilt still ate at him day and night, and he could feel it sucking at him like quicksand.

And then he had to go back to school, on top of everything.

"You've been quieter than usual," said Grace one morning. It was Sunday, which meant that he'd be flying back to school that night. "I know you've had a . . . a *time* of things, so if you ever want to talk about any of it, you know I'm here for you, Fiske."

He looked at her. He knew she meant it. He knew that she loved him and that she wanted what was best for him. "I just can't believe it happened," he said. "I can't believe that I . . . and that *you* . . . you had to drive your car off of a *cliff*?"

"Yes," said Grace. "But I'm fine. And you're fine. Everyone is fine, Fiske. You have to focus on that."

“No, they’re not,” said Fiske, running a hand over his hair. “Grace, you could have died. I could have died. And Lieutenant Oppowitz is dead, Grace. He’s not fine. You know he had two little kids? Just little, just barely even — and now he’s dead.”

Grace looked down at the ground. “I’m very sorry to hear it, Fiske.”

“And you know what the worst part of it is? It’s not like he died for his country. It’s not like he died for something he even believed in, or wanted. He was murdered because we lied to him. You and me, Grace. He thought that I was someone I wasn’t, and we told him that. He didn’t know anything about the ring, or the Clues, or the Vespers. He’s dead because of us. Because of me.”

So was George. Fiske tried not to think about it. He hadn’t been the one to push the button, to open the gate to the water above, sure. But George hadn’t seen it coming. He’d killed the lieutenant and he was going to kill Fiske, given the chance. But did that make it right? Anyone else would think he was crazy for mourning a Vesper. Still, it wasn’t something that Fiske could shake.

“No, Fiske,” said Grace. She put her hands on his shoulders and squared her face directly in front of his. “They died because of the Vespers. The Vespers, Fiske. It wasn’t you.”

Fiske looked at her, disbelief carved into his face like hieroglyphs on a tomb. How could she say that? How could she think that it wasn’t his fault? Didn’t Grace realize that if Fiske had never been on that boat, then the lieutenant would still be alive?

“You kept the ring safe. You kept yourself safe. I’m incredibly sorry about the lieutenant, Fiske, you know I am. But there are things at stake — huge, world-changing risks that need to be taken. Look what you did, Fiske,” said Grace. “You were so brave. *SO* brave, Fiske. I’ve never been prouder.”

“I don’t *want* you to be proud of me for this,” said Fiske. “I’m going to send something to Lieutenant Oppowitz’s wife. Her name is Beth. We’ll . . . I don’t know. I can’t buy them another dad. I can’t go back in time. But I’m going to do something.”

“You’re a good person, Fiske,” said Grace.

But he didn’t feel like it.



It was strange, to be back at school. The grounds were still green and the bricks were still red, even though Fiske had faked his way onto a nuclear submarine, traveled underwater from Connecticut to Puerto Rico, avoided being killed by a Vesper spy,

escaped from said submarine, and then swam to shore. Fiske didn't think that the sky needed to be orange or anything from now on — things didn't have to be that drastically different — but wasn't something supposed to have changed?

It took him a minute to realize, though, that something had — him. Before, he had scurried from class to class, from dorm to dining room with his head down and his books clutched to his chest as if all of his guts would fall out if he weren't holding himself together. Now, he looked around him as he walked. His chin wasn't buried in his chest.

It was a small change, but it made all the difference.

He went back to school, but only for exams. On his last day, a package arrived for him. He had to go to the headmaster's office to pick it up.

Sitting at the secretary's desk was a young woman with brown hair and a yellow sweater. "You're Fiske Cahill?" she said.

"Yeah," said Fiske, looking behind him to make sure that there weren't any other Fiske Cahills around. "You're new."

"Oh, yeah," she said, handing over his package. "The other lady had a family thing that she had to leave town for. I hear she was quite the piece of work. Have a nice summer!"

"Thanks for this," said Fiske, holding up the package and walking back outside. He stopped at one of the benches and opened his package. There was a small box and a letter. He opened the box first. It was a shiny silver pin — two dolphins with a rope wrapped around them. The Navy's Dolphins — what Ralph had been working so hard toward.

He opened the letter next. It read:

Dear Fiske,
First off, all is well on the Nautilus. The nuke boys got the reactor fixed once we reached port and they've assured us that now we'll be able to go even faster. Ranker says it does feel like they juiced it up some, so we'll see. Our official commission is going to happen in September, I hear. I sincerely hope that you'll be able to make it to the New London docks for the ceremony.

In the box, you'll find your Dolphins. Welcome to the crew, officially. I've got mine now, too. Let's not forget that I had to study a lot harder for mine, but both me and Commander Wilkinson think that you deserve a pair of

your own. I told the commander about George being on board to scope all of the nuke stuff and he was going to take it to a shady organization, and that you stopped him. Took him off the boat at a risk to yourself. For being something of a puke when you started, you sure proved yourself along the way. We all say well done to you.

At the end there, I'm sorry if I spooked you. I had to figure out if you were telling the truth, and that's the way that came to me. I don't know or understand exactly what was happening down there, but I'm betting it's way beyond me. Whatever it was, I hope you're managing okay and that everything's going all right.

You're a brave kid, Fiske. If no one ever told you that, now I have.

Keep an eye out for whales,

Ralph Kane,

Petty Officer Second Class

P.S. I got a promotion!

Fiske smiled, folded the letter, and pinned his Dolphins to his blazer. It looked awful nice there, all shiny and important.

"Fish! Hey, Fish Breath!" Eric Landry was beneath a tree with his friends. "Where have you been, huh? Get scared and run off after last time?"

"Family business," said Fiske. His stomach still squirmed, and he thought his hands might still shake. He didn't *like* talking to Eric, and he certainly didn't want to get another swirly, but it didn't seem worth it to be afraid of him. It wasn't like he was a Vesper. It wasn't like Fiske was trapped aboard a submarine with him and he wanted to *kill* Fiske and there was no escape.

"Family business, oooh," said Eric. "Sounds serious. Did you go visit your grandma whale, Fish Face?"

"Let me be, Eric," said Fiske.

"No," said Eric. He got up from under the tree and sauntered over to Fiske. "I've missed you, Fish. We have a lot of catching up to do." He dropped his books on the ground and handed his blazer to one of his friends. "What have you got there on your blazer, Fish? Your grandma's brooch? A fancy lady pin?"

"No," said Fiske. "It's not your business."

“Everything that goes on in this school is my business, Fish Breath. Tell me before I rip it right off of you.”

Fiske looked down at his pin, as cool and calm as he could make himself. “It’s the insignia for the Naval submarine service.”

“What, you steal it from your dad?” asked Eric.

“No,” said Fiske. “I earned it.”

“Give it to me,” said Eric. He reached out and grabbed Fiske’s collar. “I said give it to me, Fish Breath.”

Fiske looked down at Eric’s hand and then back up at him.

“No,” said Fiske.

Eric pulled his fist back and scowled his worst at Fiske.

Fiske took a deep breath and cleared his throat. There was nothing to fear in Eric Landry. He wasn’t a Vesper. There were way worse things in the world. So he opened his mouth, blinked a few times, and organized the words that he wanted to say.

“You’re going to hit me because I won’t give you my *pin*?” said Fiske. “Th-that seems like a stupid reason.”

Eric’s face faltered for just a moment. And a soft ripple went through the crowd of boys behind him. Inside, Fiske was quaking and terrified of being punched in the face. But Eric was just a boy from school.

“It’s a pretty stupid reason, Eric,” said Fiske.

“Yeah,” said one of the other boys. “It’s kind of dumb, Eric.”

Eric’s fist hovered in the air, but he glanced over his shoulder at his friends. Fiske looked, too. They looked impatient, maybe a little annoyed. “Do you want me to pound him or not?” said Eric.

“I kind of want to play football,” said Matthew.

“Oh, I call other captain!”

The crowd began to drift away as the teams were divvied up. Soon there was only Eric and Fiske.

“So?” said Eric, dropping his fist and shoving Fiske away. “You’re still just a Fish.”

Fiske took a step back and smoothed out his blazer. His heart was steadily ticking down to normal, and his nerves were coming off of a boil. He wanted to burst into laughter; he wanted to jump and to yell and to maybe — *maybe*, if no one was looking, punch the air in unadulterated triumph — because he’d stood up to Eric Landry. And Fish? Fish? What kind of insult was Fish?

Fiske glanced down at his Dolphins, gleaming against the wool of his blazer. “Yeah, Eric. I guess I am.”

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